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ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides a qualitative analysis of support services for students with disabilities and offers recommendations formulated to improve counseling services to future populations. Disability support services (DSS), as practiced by counselors in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), is examined as a model of support services available to students enrolling in postsecondary settings nationally. According to survey data complied by the American Council of Education (ACE), over 9% of all freshmen report having disabilities. Community colleges serve a greater proportion of this population than any other institutions of higher education. Counselors in community colleges are particularly impacted by this growing population. This study uses naturalistic inquiry to analyze the structure of disability support services at VCCS. A 2000 survey by the Virginia Board for Persons with Disabilities indicated that 59% of VCCS institutions responding (18%) had written policies regarding disability support services, compared with 92% of four-year colleges and universities. This study examines documentation standards counselors use to provide services, provision of core services, systems-wide support and coordination for providers of services, and funding and resources. Appended are: American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Research Brief (AACC-RB-97-1), "Disability Support Services in Community Colleges" (Lynn Barnett and Yong Li); AHEAD Program Standards; and materials from the Virginia Community College Disability Services Conference (Richmond, VA, June 11, 1999). (Contains 45 references and 8 tables.) (Author/NB)

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ED 466 881

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DISABILITIES SUPPORT SERVICES IN THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM: HOW CAN WE BETTER SERVE SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS?

by

Robert J. Tutton, M.S., Ed. S.

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Arts
Community College Education

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A Qualitative Analysis Of Disabilities Support Services In The Virginia Community College System: How Can We Better Serve Special Needs Students?

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Arts in Community College Education (Counseling).

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DEDICATION

As community colleges counselors have struggled to meet the demands of the increasing enrollments of students with disabilities in the last decade, essentially they have had to rely upon their own meager resources to respond to the unique challenges presented by this special population. This manuscript embodies the growing movement of Disability Support Services personnel who seek to improve and enhance services to their clients by implementing professional standards on a system-wide basis. This dissertation is, therefore, dedicated to the professional development efforts of my colleagues who have worked so diligently to provide support services to students with disabilities in community college settings. It is my sincere hope that this project enhances those efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to apologize in advance for what will undoubtedly represent my failure to give adequate recognition to all of my friends who helped me to complete this project. To ensure that some semblance of protocol is observed, however, I offer the following attempt to provide a measure of recognition to some of those who contributed so much toward this manuscript.

First and foremost, to Ray Drinkwater, my supervisor, and my true friend, I am unable to articulate the countless ways in which you helped me every step of the way along this journey. Without your personal words of encouragement, I would not have attempted this doctoral program in the first place. It was also your continued support that kept me plugging away, despite my frustrations and tribulations. The time you gave to serve as a member of my committee, when you were already clearly overextended, is but one of many examples of your contributions in this process.

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Ruth Varney graciously gave her time to serve as a reader, proofing the pages for errors and clarity. She did this at the expense of her own doctoral studies, eloquently addressing what a giving and generous person she has been.

To say that Chris Boutin provided me with typing and clerical support for this dissertation would be a gross understatement of the role that she contributed. While I had typed the first rough draft in my own slow and tedious manner, the reality is that I ran out of steam in the process. If Chris had not stepped in to correctly type the manuscript in accordance with the prescribed format, I seriously doubt that I would have ever finished it. I failed to mention that Chris also sacrificed time from her own collegiate work and her young family, to push me to the finish line. I also fail to find the words to express how eternally grateful I am for all she sacrificed to ensure that I finished this project.

Finally, I again apologize that space does not permit me to do justice to all of those who contributed to this project. I do, however, realize that I am indeed fortunate that you believed enough in me to help me to complete it. I assure you that I will do my utmost to uphold your faith in me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page
List of Tables vi
List of Abbreviations viii
Abstract ix
1. Introduction 1
Background 1
Statement of the Problem 3
Statement of Purpose 4
Significance of the Study 5
Research Questions 6
Limitations 7
Definitions of Terms 8
Summary 9
2. Literature Review 11
Background 11
Enrollment Increases 12
Increases in Learning Disabilities 16
Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance 18
Disability Support Services 26
Conclusion 36
3. Research Methodology 37
A Description of Naturalistic Inquiry 37
Research Design 38
Human as Instrument 39
Data Collection 40
Phase I: Responses from the Virginia Community College System Conference on Disabilities Workshops 41
Boundries of the Study 41
Phase II: Anaylsis of Relevant Studies 44
Summary 45

4. Presentation and Analysis of the Data....46
Focus Concern I: Documentation Standards....47
Large Group Discussions and Observations....47
Analysis of Documentation Concerns....51
Focus Concern II: Core Services....60
Large Group Discussions of Core Services....60
Analysis of Core Services....66
Focus Concern III: Systems-wide Coordination....69
Large Group Discussions of Systems-wide Coordination....69
Analysis of Systems-wide Coordination Concerns....72
Focus Concern IV: Funding....74
Large Group Discussions on Funding....74
Analysis of Funding Concerns....79
Summary....81
5. Findings, Recommendations, and Implications....86
Purpose....86
Research Methods....88
Findings and Results....89
Documentations....89
Core Services....90
Systems-wide Coordination and Support....91
Funding and Resources....92
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research....94
Implications....95
Conclusion....97
Appendix A
Appendix B
Appendix C
List of References....99

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Percentage of Full-Time College Freshman Reporting Disabilities: Selected Years	13
2. Observations and Recommendations of Workgroup	50
3. Draft: Guidelines for Documentation of Disability	52
4. Verification Distribution Survey	56
5. Ad-Hoc Workgroup Report: Core Services	64
6. Ad-Hoc Workgroup Report: Statewide Coordination	71
7. Ad-Hoc Workgroup Report: Funding	77
8. Ad-Hoc Workgroup Recommendations and Analysis	83

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACC - American Association of Community Colleges

ACE - American Council of Education

ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

ADHD - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

AHEAD - Association of Higher Education & Disabilities

AHEAD-VA - Association of Higher Education & Disabilities of Virginia

AHRC - American Health Resource Center

CUNY - City University of New York Committee for the Disabled

DSS - Disability Support Services/Specialists

DVH - Department for the Visually Handicapped

IDEA - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

LD - Learning Disability

NCES - National Center for Educational Statistics maintained by the USDOE

NJCD - National Joint Committee on Disabilities-

OCR - Office of Civil Rights

SCHEV - State Council of Higher Education in Virginia

USDOE - United States Department of Education

VADRS - Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services

VCCS - Virginia Community College System

ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF DISABILITIES SUPPORT SERVICES IN THE VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM: HOW CAN WE BETTER SERVE SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS?

Robert J. Tutton, DACCE

George Mason University, 2001

Dissertation Director: Dr. Gustavo Mellander

This dissertation first provides a qualitative analysis of support services for students with disabilities, and then offers recommendations formulated to improve counseling services to future populations. Disability support services, as it is practiced by counselors in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), is critically examined as a microcosm of support services available to students enrolling in postsecondary settings nationally. To gain a better understanding of disability support services (DSS) as it exits in the VCCS, the author first conducts a review of the literature regarding the issues confronting all colleges as a result of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The challenges and professional responsibilities imposed upon counselors by the increasing numbers of students with disabilities seeking DSS in community colleges is then contrasted with those of four year colleges and universities.

Using a qualitative design called Naturalistic Inquiry, the dissertation then utilizes the macrocosmic framework established in the review of the literature, to provide an analysis of how counselors in the VCCS view their ability to fulfill their professional responsibilities as disability support services providers. In the process of completing this study, the author collected data from 36 counselors serving as disabilities support services professionals from 16 of Virginia's community colleges. The data for the study consisted of feedback from large group discussions, the written observations and recommendations of ad hoc work-groups of these subjects. The study also provides comparisons with, and references to numerous qualitative studies and national surveys obtained from authoritative sources in the literature to enrich the findings.

This dissertation will be presented to the Virginia Community College System and the Higher Education Workgroup to be used as a resource to promote system-wide coordination and improvements for disabilities support services in community colleges in the future. The project is also intended to serve as a resource for community college counselors and administrators seeking to improve or enhance disability support services on their respective campuses. As the role of the disability support services specialist as an emergent professional entity continues to evolve in postsecondary settings, it is the hope of this author that the scholarship provided in this project will help counselors better serve students with disabilities in community colleges.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background

Serving students with disabilities has emerged as one of the most significant challenges confronting higher education today, in part because of this population's increasing numbers. Current survey data compiled by the American Council of Education's (ACE) HEATH Resource Center (Henderson, 1999) reveals that over 9.4 percent of all freshmen entering college report having disabilities. ACE (Henderson, 1999) also reports that the percentage of freshmen who report having a disability has tripled since the end of the 1970s. Serving students with disabilities poses even more formidable challenges for community colleges because they continue to attract more of this population than any other segment of higher education. The results of the statistical profile of freshmen compiled by the HEATH Resource Center in 1998 revealed that "freshman with disabilities were more likely to enroll in community colleges (46 percent) than were their peers who did not report disabilities" (Henderson, 1999, p. 5). Additionally, since 1990 there has been a 90 percent increase in the number of technical and community colleges offering opportunities for students with disabilities, according to Stodden, Jessen, and Lolotai (1998). More and more of these students are now actively seeking (sometimes demanding) special services. Barnett (1996) confirms this trend by noting that, "half of the eight percent of students reporting disabilities also request disabilities support services, compared with one-third requesting special services in 1992" (p. 4).

This rapid growth of students with disabilities, and their increasing tendency to seek services has often contributed to confusion on the part of the community college faculty and staff, especially counselors, regarding how to serve these students. Frustration levels and confusion are particularly high for counselors with regard to how to provide appropriate accommodations to students with the so-called "invisible disabilities," such as learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, and psychological disorders. Between 1988 and 1998, the fastest growing category of reported disability among college students was learning disability. By 1998, two in five freshmen with disabilities reported having a learning disability (Henderson, 1999). Learning disabled students, furthermore, are far more likely to attend community colleges (41 percent) than their peers not reporting disabilities (Henderson, 1995). In it's 1996 survey, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), (Barnett & Li, 1997) reports that community colleges participating. in the survey indicated that the most frequently requested accommodation by students was for learning disabilities (38 percent). The American Association of Community Colleges also indicted that this represents a five percent increase in the category of learning disabled students being served since the previous survey was conducted in 1992 (Barnett, 1996).

Students with these invisible disabilities enrolling in open-access two year colleges present complex and highly technical challenges for counselors, faculty, and staff who are to provide them with the reasonable accommodations that are mandated by both the Americans with Disabilities Act (Public Law 101-336, 1990), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112). For many faculty and administrators, it is unclear what constitutes reasonable accommodations, particularly when the disability is documented as a complex learning disability or a psychiatric disorder. The task of

interpreting complex disorders and providing support services to students with disabilities in community colleges has resulted in the evolution of a relatively new job description for counselors appointed to this role. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (Barnett & Li, 1997), counselors assigned to the job of serving in this role are often referred to as Disability Support Specialists (DSS).

Although, the American Association of Community Colleges (1996) describes a wide array of support services that are to be provided by Disability Support Specialists to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities in community colleges. According to Stodden, Jensen, and Lolotai (1998), the important issues are deciding which specific accommodations are appropriate to which students, and under what conditions they should be applied. It should be noted that the breadth and scope and differing missions of community colleges contributes to the wide disparities in services to students with disabilities in community colleges. According to the National Joint Committee on Disabilities (Dublinske, 1999), these variables have created a situation resulting in little consistency in the way community colleges provide services to students with disabilities.

Statement of the Problem

In the decade since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the increasing numbers of students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education has challenged the ability of counselors to respond to the complex needs of this population. Community colleges, however, face even more challenges in the struggle to provide disability support services, for several important reasons. First of all, the literature indicates more students are seeking enrollments in community colleges than any other segment of higher education (Henderson, 1999; Barnett & Li, 1997). Secondly, more students with learning disorders and more complex psychological disorders are also enrolling in public, two-year

institutions. Third, community colleges generally do not have access to the same resources as four-year colleges and universities, and therefore, are less equipped to cope with the complex problems presented by the increasing numbers of students with disabilities coming to these campuses.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Disabilities Support Specialists serving in the 23 institutions in the Virginia Community College System are currently approaching the provision of services to students in different ways. These divergent practices have the potential to create inconsistencies and barriers in the manner that students do or do not receive appropriate accommodations in the Virginia Community College System, particularly with regard to serving students with psychological disorders (Williams, 1999). Many Disabilities Support Specialists in the VCCS have for some time expressed concerns with the wide array of methods and procedures utilized to provide appropriate accommodations and support services throughout the 23 community colleges in Virginia. These concerns became so acute that in 1999, some of these counselors requested the support of the Virginia Community College System Office to help organize a conference in order to address some of the major issues confronting disabilities support providers (Williams, 1999). The Conference on Disabilities was held with the support of the Virginia Community College System, in Richmond, Virginia on June 11,1999. The issues discussed by the 44 participants who attended this conference represent the level of concern regarding both the nature and quality of disability support services available in the Virginia Community College System.

Statement of Purpose

As more and more students with disabilities enroll in Virginia Community Colleges, there needs to be a greater understanding of the structure of counseling and support

services to these students. Is the current system of providing service delivery to students with disabilities differently at 23 institutions serving the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia in an effective manner? After a decade since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, what are some of the major issues and concerns regarding disability support services in the Virginia Community College System? Even more importantly, what are some of the ways in which Virginia's community colleges can improve counseling services to students with disabilities in the future?

Significance of the Study

As will be documented in Chapter Two, a significant amount of literature currently exists regarding students with disabilities in postsecondary education. Unfortunately, the majority of this data is in the form of surveys and quantitative studies. There is a paucity of data in the form of qualitative studies concerning the provision of counseling services to students with disabilities. To date, there has not been a qualitative study completed on counseling services in the Virginia Community College System.

This project is, therefore, significant in that it adds to the growing body of literature regarding disability support services in postsecondary education. The research portion of this project is also important in that it contributes specific scholarship with respect to the Disability Support Specialist in community college settings. The most important contribution, however, is the impact of this project upon the continuing struggles of those dedicated persons seeking to improve counseling and support services to students with disabilities.

Toward this end, this research provides a candid analysis of four specific areas of concern listed in the next section regarding disability support services in the Virginia Community College System. This project articulates cogent recommendations by

experts. The experts are 36 Disabilities Support Specialists who have offered constructive solutions to redress systemic problems. They represent a scholarly endeavor to improve and enhance the consistency and quality of support services to students with disabilities enrolling in Virginia's community colleges in the future.

Research Questions

To gain a better understanding of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System, this researcher first conducted a review of the literature. The review of the literature began by examining the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) upon higher education and community colleges at the national level. The review of the literature then examined the legal requirements of the American with Disabilities Act, and how these mandates have specifically impacted upon counselors serving as Disabilities Support Specialists in community colleges across the nation. Through a review of the literature on the provision of counseling and support services to students with disabilities in postsecondary education in general, and Virginia community colleges in particular, I was able to generate the following four research questions:

1. What documentation standards and procedures should counselors be using to determine disability support services for students claiming disabilities in Virginia Community Colleges?
2. What types of core services should be available to students with disabilities at all Virginia Community Colleges?
3. What types of systems-wide technical assistance and coordination regarding disabilities support services issues should be provided by the

Virginia Community College System?

4. How can community colleges in Virginia obtain adequate resources to provide for the increasing numbers of students with disabilities?

Data for the study was collected in two phases. Phase I consisted of collecting the responses and data from the 36 counselors who attended the Virginia Community College System Conference on Disability Support Services and who subsequently participated in the four workgroups. Phase II consisted of an analysis of current findings in the literature as it related directly to the four focus issues cited above. A complete description of the Naturalistic Method of Inquiry, as well as the research design, and data collection techniques used in this study, are clearly articulated in Chapter Three.

Limitations

Care should be taken not to over-generalize the findings of this study to other populations. The target populations of both the respondents, and the clients referenced in this study are specifically addressed to disabilities support services in the Virginia Community College System. For example, to assume that the findings of this study would have applicability to community colleges in another state, or even in other segments of the higher education community could prove to be questionable at best, and possibly erroneous. Additionally, by analyzing the responses of the most experienced counselors who volunteered to participate in the Disability Support Services Workgroups, one could readily argue that the study was conducted on a biased sample of the population. It should also be noted, however, that the purpose of this study is to conduct a critical analysis of the current structure of disabilities support services in community colleges. Therefore, the use of responses obtained from some of the most experienced and committed Disability Support Services Counselors in the Virginia Community

College System, should yield much richer results than randomization procedures of the subjects would provide.

The results of this type of qualitative study are also limited by the lack of controls and descriptive statistical comparisons available through quantitative techniques. Since the purpose of this study, however, is to provide analysis and professional recommendations, the use of quantitative techniques could also limit the richness (quality) of the responses on the four focus questions. One possibility for improvement in the design, would be to administer surveys to counselors regarding some of the disability support services issues addressed in these findings in the future. Although this study will cite examples of the results of such data obtained from authoritative sources such as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the Association on Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD), relevant to the issues under analysis in the four focus questions, the findings of this study could still be greatly enhanced in the future, if follow-up studies would incorporate the use of a quantitative instrument(s) in the design. The Council for the Advancement of Standards for student services/development programs has developed one instrument that has been used by colleges to qualitatively assess the effectiveness of disability support services since 1988 (CAS, 1988; 1998). This CAS document contains comprehensive disability support services standards and guidelines which clearly articulate the legal and ethical responsibilities and parameters of such programs. This useful package also provides an assessment instrument that encompasses 13 program components that utilize a five point rating scale which could be used to enrich a future study with quantitative data.

Definition of Terms

Ability-to-benefit is a Virginia Community College System policy that evaluates

students who do not possess a high school diploma or GED to determine admissions/enrollment status.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is defined in the DSM-IV by the APA (1994, p. 78) as "a persistent pattern of inattention and/or hyperactivity – impulsivity that is more frequent and severe than is typically observed in individuals at a comparable level of development."

Carl D. Perkins Act of 1990 is a federal legislation that provides funds for grants, available to colleges to assist populations with special needs.

The HEATH Resource Center is a division of the American Council of Education's Cooperative Institutional Research Program located at UCLA in California.

Invisible disabilities are disabilities that do not have a readily recognizable component (usually associated with psychological disorders, such as LD, ADHD, etc.).

Learning Disability is defined in the DSM-IV by the APA (1994, p. 46) as "Learning problems that significantly interferes with academic achievement of activities of daily living that require reading, mathematical, or writing skills."

Office of Civil Rights a division of the U. S. Department of Justice that investigates allegations and complaints of violations of federal laws.

Office of Special Education a division of the U.S. Department of Education that specializes in special education matters.

RADDS is a computer program utilized by public colleges in Virginia to account for special populations of students.

Tech Prep Initiatives are vocational and technical education initiatives funded by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Technical Act of 1990.

Summary

Chapter One contains an introduction and overview of the problem statement of this project. The purpose of the project, along with the significance provided by this scholarship are addressed. The research questions, along with an explanation of data collection methods is also delineated. Finally, the limitations of the study are articulated,

and a comprehensive definition of technical abbreviations and terms referenced in this study is listed to ensure clarity. The succeeding chapter provides a review of the literature, as it relates to this analysis of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Background

Before the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), obtaining accurate data regarding the number of students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary education, while estimated to be increasing, was difficult to obtain. For example, the City University of New York Committee for the Disabled estimated in 1988 that between three and ten percent of college students reported having physical or learning disabilities requiring classroom accommodations, but admitted that it was very difficult to obtain reliable figures of this population (Davis, 1993). Referencing academic accommodations in higher education prior to the passage of Americans with Disabilities Act, Davis observed "such accommodations are neither difficult to provide nor distracting to the rest of the class" (1993, p.31).

Davis' commentary provides a historical perspective of the pre-Americans with Disabilities Act era, however, this section will examine the following three important elements that were missing from her observation:

(1) The passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990);

(2) The numbers of students with disabilities attending community colleges; and

(3) The increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities and psychological disorders.

Enrollment Increases

A review of the literature supports the phenomenon of the increasing numbers of students with disabilities in postsecondary settings since the passage of Americans with Disabilities Act (Wood & Lazzari, 1997; Davis, 1993; Barnett & Li, 1997; Henderson, 1995,1999). The American Council of Education's Biennial Statistical Profile of College Freshman with Disabilities, which is published by the HEATH Resource Center (1999), has served as one particularly valuable resource for longitudinal data regarding freshmen with disabilities entering postsecondary education since 1978. HEATH reports (Henderson, 1999) that in 1978, the first year their surveys included questions on disabilities, slightly less than three percent of freshmen reported a disability. For each year after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, the longitudinal data compiled by HEATH (1999) shows the percentages of freshmen reporting disabilities has increased dramatically (see Table 1). HEATH reports that by 1998, "the percentage of freshmen reporting disabilities had more than tripled to nine percent. This meant that one in every 11 freshman enrolled full time reported at least one disability" (1999. p. 3).

Table 1

Precentage of Full-Time College Freshmen Reporting Disabilities: Selected Years

Disability	1988	1991	1994	1996	1998
Speech 0.3%	0.5%	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%	
Orthopedic	1.0%	1.2%	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%
Learning disability	1.2%	2.2%	3.0%	3.1%	3.5%
Health-related	1.2%	1.3%	1.5%	1.6%	1.7%
Partially sighted or blind	1.9%	2.2%	2.0%	2.0%	1.1%
Hearing*	0.8%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Other	1.4%	1.6%	1.7%	1.8%	1.9%
Total	7.0%	8.8%	9.2%	9.2%	9.4%

*Hearing data were not collected in 1998. The 1998 figure reflects the 1996 data.

Note: Figures in columns do not necessarily equal the totals at the bottom, because individuals were allowed to identify more than one disability.

Source: HEATH Resource Center (1999).

Some sources, however, are not willing to blame the Americans with Disabilities Act as the sole reason for the rising tide of students seeking higher education since 1990. Wood & Lazzari (1997) cite the following three additional factors contributing to the increases:

a. Twenty years have passed since the Rehabilitation Act of (1973) P.L. 94-142 was enacted. We now have a generation of students with disabilities who are accustomed to an appropriate education in our public schools.
b. As a result of legislation and litigation, more postsecondary educational opportunities are available to students with disabilities.
c. Public awareness and acceptance of individuals with disabilities has increased, resulting in a wider variety of opportunities and supports (p.1).

It appears likely that all of the factors cited above are contributing variables, with the attention of the Americans with Disabilities Act serving as a driving force or catalyst that propelled more students with disabilities to seek higher educational opportunities. The United States Department of Education's (USDOE) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has recently become another valuable source of information regarding the numbers of students with disabilities in postsecondary education. The National Center for Education Statistics recently conducted a national survey of two-year and four-year postsecondary educational institutions specifically addressing a range of issues regarding services to students with disabilities enrolled between 1996-97 or 1997-98 (USDOE,1998). The National Center for Education Statistics reported that between 1996 and 1998, about three quarters of the nation's colleges enrolled an estimated 428,280 students with disabilities (USDOE, 1998). National Center for Education Statistics

(1998) also reported that most of the students with disabilities were enrolled at public two-year and public four-year institutions.

Serving students with disabilities in community colleges presents even more formidable challenges for counselors providing disabilities support services because these two-year institutions continue to attract more of this special population than any other segment of higher education. The United States Department Of Education 1992-93 National Postsecondary Survey (NPSAS) reported that 71 percent of all students with disabilities attending public institutions of higher education were enrolled in community colleges; with only 29 percent enrolled in four-year colleges (1993). According to the National Postsecondary Survey data, this represented an eight percent increase of students having a disability at community colleges since the 1988 study (USDOE, 1993).

What has contributed to this recent increase in the numbers of students with disabilities entering community colleges? HEATH speculates two likely causes. The first, and most obvious, is that there has been a surge in the numbers of high school graduates. The second is that community colleges may be better able to accommodate these graduates in 1998 (1999). HEATH's survey provides support for this speculation by way of student responses to the question regarding their reason for their selection of colleges. The two reasons most frequently cited by students with disabilities were the special programs offered by the community colleges, and advice from their guidance counselors (1999).

An examination of information provided by agencies that also serve persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia indicates that the numbers of students will continue to increase for the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). For example, The Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Rehabilitation (DRS) signed an agreement with the Virginia Community College System in 1996, that mandates that the

Virginia Community College System will be used to provide college level training to its clients, unless it can be demonstrated that the specific courses are unavailable (DRS, 1996). Another indication of the potential population pool for the Virginia Community College System, Department of Rehabilitation Services reported that there were 314,000 individuals between the ages of 18-65 with disabilities in Virginia (DRS, 1997).

Increases in Learning Disabilities

In addition to the increasing numbers of disabled students entering postsecondary education, the greatest growth in percentages are reported for the category of learning disabilities (Wood & Lazzari, 1997). The National Center for Education Statistics also reports that learning disabilities were the most frequently disclosed disability (46 percent) in their 1996-97 or 1997-98 survey for all postsecondary institutions (USDOE, 1999).

Not only does the literature report learning disabilities as the most frequently requested category by students in higher education, but it also indicated a trend toward this population seeking enrollment in two-year colleges. For example, the 1996 survey data obtained from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) verifies that learning disabilities comprised the largest category of students served (38 percent) in 1996 (Barnett, 1996). The same source shows that this figure represents a five percent increase in the category of learning disabled students being served since the 1992 survey was conducted of community colleges (Barnett, 1996). The data strongly indicates that this category will also continue to increase. HEATH (1999) reports that over half of the 57,999 freshmen reporting learning disabilities in 1998 were attending community colleges. While the numbers of students with learning disabilities are increasing in community colleges, it is problematic that these institutions rarely have either the funds, or the resource personnel that are available in most four-year colleges and universities.

There have been several interagency actions that have taken place in Virginia that will likely continue to increase the numbers of students with all categories of disabilities attending community colleges in the Commonwealth. For example, the Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services (VA-DRS) directed his rehabilitation counselors to refer any clients to Virginia community colleges as the college of first choice (DRS, 1996). In the same year, the Commissioner also directed his counselors to refer all persons with learning disorders to Virginia Community College System institutions (DRS, 1996). The Commissioner took this approach because of the lower tuition rates, open-door policies and accessibility of Virginia's community colleges.

The Virginia Department of Education has also entered into two formal arrangements with the Virginia Community College System that are contributing to the increases in all populations of students with disabilities, but particularly with respect to learning disabilities. The most extensive of these arrangements between the Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Community College System is through the Tech Prep Initiatives. Tech Prep is "a secondary to postsecondary career path linked to business, industry, labor, government, and the community that leads to further education and employment" (Thuli, 1995, p.3). The intent of Tech Prep programs, as stated in the Carl D. Perkins Act of 1990 (PL 101-392, 1990) is to "enable equitable participation for members of special populations, including provision of services needed for them to participate successfully in high quality vocational education programs". While Tech Prep initiatives have been evolving since its original funding through the Perkins Act in 1990, it should be emphasized that many community colleges in Virginia have implemented formal agreements with the secondary public schools in their service areas. While the special populations served by Tech Prep encompasses all categories of disabilities under special education, learning disabilities constitutes the preponderance of the population.

Many of these colleges in the Virginia Community College System are already experiencing increases in enrollments from this arrangement, particularly with students with learning disabilities. For a look at the pool of potential referrals to the Virginia Community College System, the Virginia Department of Education reported that in the 1995-96 school year there were 141,351 students (ages 3-22) with disabilities in the Commonwealth. According to this agency, this represents an increase of 13,121 in this population since the 1993-94 school year (VA DOE, 1997).

It is apparent that significant increases in the caseloads of students with disabilities such as those in the previous section would result in a challenge for the counselors serving as disability support providers. What is probably not as apparent is why these increasing caseloads are posing such problems for disability support providers in community colleges in particular. The next section provides a review of the literature with respect to why the legal protections afforded by the laws pertaining to services to students with disabilities in postsecondary settings place such a unique burden upon counselors serving as Disability Support Services Specialists in community colleges.

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance

According to the author of Disability Compliance for Higher Education, no other single special population of students in higher education has been afforded the degree of legal protection as that of students with disabilities (Gephart, 2000). A common public misperception is that this protection began with the passage of The Americans With Disabilities Act (Public Law 101-336, 1991). The protection of students with disabilities was actually first extended with the passage of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, provided that the postsecondary settings involved were receiving federal funding or assistance (as most community colleges were). As noted in the ADA Compliance Manual, (Duston et.

al., 1992) "the ADA did far more than simply add disability to the list of protected classes under federal law, and it is not simply a duplication of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It was Congress' intent to effect sweeping changes in the attitudes and practices of all segments of American institutions serving persons with disabilities... colleges can no longer simply ignore the Americans with Disabilities Act, or put compliance on the back burner because the Americans with Disabilities Act is a real law, and will be enforced" (1992, p. 3).

In the ten years since the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, colleges have had a number of difficulties related to providing appropriate accommodations. According to Perspective, a monthly periodical on campus legal issues, the following represent the most obvious problems for disability support services in postsecondary institutions:

- An overemphasis on facilities, at the expense of important program issues;
- Failure to publicize the appointment of a coordinator on every campus;
- A lack of an effective grievance systems with due process elements;
- A lack of college priority on Americans with Disabilities Act issues;
- A lack of campus reasonable accommodation policies; and
- Insufficient faculty-staff awareness and training; (Black,Vol. 14, 12, 1999, p.2)

Compliance for colleges with these types of problems has become such a complex issue that a resource called Disability Compliance For Higher Education is now widely disseminated on a monthly basis to help colleges properly implement accommodations to students with disabilities. The headlines in Volume 2, Issue 10 (May, 1997) of this new

publication stated "Disability-Related Complaints, OCR Compliance Concerns Continue to Rise." (p. 1). This same source noted that approximately 800 complaints had been filed with the Office of Civil Rights between September 1994 and October 1995. This represented an increase of 250 complaints over the previous year.

Since the majority of students with disabilities seeking admissions to postsecondary education enroll in community colleges (Henderson, 1999), this segment of higher education needs to be particularly proactive in the manner in which it administers programs to this population. Therefore, it is critical that community colleges assign disability support staff who not only fully understand the laws, but can and will educate the faculty, support staff, and administrators who serve these students regarding legal provisions. This section will briefly review some of the major provisions of the laws impacting upon students with disabilities in higher education, and it concludes with some of the major implications of these laws as they particularly relate to disability support services programs in community colleges.

As part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-112), Congress enacted Section 504, the first federal civil rights law protecting the rights of students with disabilities. Section 504 provides that "otherwise qualified students with disabilities cannot be excluded from participation under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance solely by reason of a disability" (USEOC & USDOJ, 1991). For purposes of postsecondary education services, a qualified student with a disability is one who meets the academic and technical standards requisite to admission or participation in

the institution's education programs or activities. According to Section 504, a disabled student is:

> "One who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as caring for one's self, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working" (PL 93-112, 1973).

Specific requirements mandated by PL 93-112 for postsecondary institutions include the following:

1. Students with disabilities must be afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and thus benefit from all programs, services, and activities.
2. All programs and activities must be offered in the most integrated setting appropriate to the individual.
3. Academic requirements must be modified on a case-by-case basis to afford qualified students with disabilities and applicants an equal opportunity to participate and complete educational programs (modifications may include changes in the length of time permitted for completion of requirements and/or assignments, substitution of specific courses required for the completion of degree or certificate programs, and the adaptation of the manner in which specific courses are conducted). Academic requirements that the college can demonstrate are essential to the program of instruction or to any directly related licensing requirements will not be considered discriminatory.

4. Colleges may be required to provide students with one or more of the following auxiliary aids: taped texts, note takers, interpreters, readers, student tutors, television enlargers, talking calculators, electronic readers, braille textbooks or calculators and classroom equipment adapted for persons with manual impairments (P. L. 93-112. 1973).

The Americans with Disabilities Act provides protection to individuals with disabilities in the areas of employment, public accommodations, state and local government services, and telecommunications. The Americans with Disabilities Act actually extends the general non-discrimination provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to those government agencies and the public sector that do not receive federal financial assistance. The Americans with Disabilities Act also serves to accomplish the following:

1. Sets forth standards for what constitutes discrimination on the basis of a physical or mental disability;
2. Formalized the requirements for colleges to assign a person responsible for assuring access and compliance with reasonable accommodations;
3. Vastly increased public awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities to advocate for accommodations in all educational settings (U.S. EEOC & Department of Justice, 1991).

It is apparent from the increasing numbers of court cases and complaints by students with disabilities in higher education, that the laws cited in this section are complex and impact all areas of these institutions. As mentioned earlier, community colleges serve

most of the students enrolling in higher education. Community colleges also differ in terms of open access policies, and rarely have some of the resources available to them that are available in some major four-year colleges and universities. The John Tyler Community College Faculty Handbook for Students with Disabilities (Tutton, 1997) represents implications that are particularly relevant for disability support services programs at community colleges concerning these distinctions:

1. All colleges must assign a responsible contact person to ensure compliance with the provisions cited in this section, but because of the differences cited above, it is particularly important that community colleges carefully select a person who is competent to fully understand the applications of these laws as they relate to issues of admissions, placement testing, access to educational accommodations and all student support services. Since counseling personnel function as gate-keepers, and assist students with disabilities with enrollment procedures and recommend specific accommodations (particularly with respect to learning disabilities), it appears to be preferable that counselors be assigned to serve as Disabilities Support Services contacts in community colleges. While the Americans with Disabilities Act does not specify which personnel should be assigned, the gaining importance of rehabilitation counseling and the interpretation of testing and assessment data regarding psychological disabilities for the provision of appropriate accommodations provides even stronger support for

counselors to either be assigned as the DSS contact; or at least be assigned as a key person to assist with this responsibility.

2. While the laws pertaining to students with disabilities prohibit discrimination, they do not mandate that colleges must admit otherwise unqualified individuals. While most community colleges have open-access policies, many also cite certain minimum requirements for determining general admission, and admission to specific curricula. For example, many colleges in the Virginia Community College System cite completion of high school or GED, and minimum placement test scores as their ability-to-benefit requirements. A disabled student who fails to meet ability-to-benefit qualifications may be denied admissions to either the community college or to its programs, provided that the standards were not applied in a discriminatory manner. However, particular care must be taken with respect to providing appropriate special accommodations for the administration of placement tests, if such scores are to be used to determine admissions. For example, if a learning disabled student properly discloses and documents that he or she is permitted extended time on testing, and is subsequently denied this accommodation on the college's placement tests, the student could seek action to cite discrimination against community colleges who denied such a student admissions based on the test scores.

3. Finally, community colleges are not required by the Americans with Disabilities Act or the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 to provide testing or diagnostic assessments for suspected cases of psychological disorders or learning disabilities at no charge, unless it can be demonstrated that the college specifically provides such assessments as a part of their regular offerings. Many major universities do have "psychological service centers" that offer psychological or learning disabilities assessments, and must, therefore, afford its students with access, if requested. In contrast, community colleges rarely offer such resources, and are not compelled to provide them. Community colleges must however always provide full and reasonable accommodations to all students who present appropriate diagnostic assessments and documentation of learning disabilities or related disorders (p. 5-6).

The previous sections demonstrate that not only are the numbers of students with disabilities increasing at community colleges at dramatic rates, but these students are now more actively seeking legally complex accommodations. This data raises some serious issues and questions regarding the sufficiency with which community colleges are providing resources for this population. The resource issue is particularly compelling for students with disabilities because, as mentioned in Section III, compliance is stringently mandated by federal laws. This next section reviews and comments on some of the types of services and accommodations that are currently being provided to students with disabilities on community college campuses.

A lack of current statistical data is often a problem with conducting an accurate analysis of services and population in any system. Fortunately for the purpose of this research, the American Association of Community Colleges, with funding support from the United States Department of Education, provides an invaluable source of current information regarding disability support services in community colleges. The American Association of Community Colleges conducted comprehensive surveys of this country's community colleges disability support services in both 1992 and 1996. The complete analysis of these survey results were compiled and published in their Directory of Disability Support Services in Community Colleges (Barnett, 1996). Due to the uniquely direct relevance of the directory, this section will rely heavily on the data in this resource to examine the types of services that community colleges are providing students with disabilities. A copy of the Research Brief (AACC-RB-97-1) containing a full text of the survey results is Appendix A of this paper (Barnett & Li, 1997).

Disability Support Services

The good news is that according to the American Association of Community Colleges survey, 79.4 percent of all campuses reporting indicated that they had a Disability Support Office in 1996. This implies an almost ten percent improvement from the 70 percent figure that was reported in the 1992 survey. However, further examination of the data reveals that, in practice, the responsibilities for fulfilling the disabilities support services functions falls upon a wide array of personnel, including:

> Registrars, directors of assessment, advancement or grants officers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, academic deans, institutional research officers, academic support coordinators, and support services staff (Barnett, 1996, p. 4).

While it appears to be a positive indicator that there is statistical improvement of almost ten percent over the 1992 survey in disability support services duties, concern must be directed to the qualifications and training of these individuals. The Americans with Disabilities Act now mandates that a contact be appointed at each institution. However, appointing a college official with this responsibility only provides token compliance with this portion of the law. As will be discussed in the next section, this posture does not come close to ensuring that the challenges presented in the previous section are adequately fulfilled. One might also speculate that since it is a legal requirement for institutions to appoint a contact person, those colleges that are not in compliance with this provision might be less likely to respond to the survey. In other words, the data might be slightly positively skewed because community colleges that are fully complying might be more likely to respond to the survey.

Barnett also observes that, "the inclusion of grants officers as disabilities contact staff suggests that some Disabilities Support Services rely on outside funding for operation" (1996, p. 4). While additional funding sources may be useful (even crucial), one might ask if a grants officer would have the skills to interpret a psychological evaluation for a learning disabled student, and authoritatively recommend those specific instructional accommodations that faculty should follow.

As indicated previously, the American Association of Community Colleges' surveys conducted in both 1992 and 1996 provides excellent comparisons of data for those two periods. Figures six and seven from the 1996 survey may be found in Appendix A for complete comparisons of all 28 categories of services provided, including those "most frequently provided, and those least frequently provided" (Barnett & Li, 1997). While these charts indicate that these categories remained fairly consistent in the orders of frequency, there were some interesting changes reported. First, an additional category

called study skills training was added in 1995. It is significant to note that "78.8 percent of the respondents now provide that service," (p. 7) this is an important service for learning disabled students in particular. These results may be indicating a positive response to better serving this population.

Barnett also reports that the following services increased since 1992:

> "Interpreters (up 12%), taped texts (up 10 %), note-taker/readers/scribes (up 9.6%), and disabilities support staff offices (up 9.4%). Most dramatic was the use of adaptive equipment/technology (up 23%)"(p. 6).

Taken collectively, this data indicates that disabilities support services assistance/accommodations have increased since 1992, particularly with respect to increases in the use of adaptive equipment/technology.

During her examination of Disabilities Support Staff outreach activities, Barnett observes that:

> community college disability support service programs are involved in a variety of activities to connect with people outside the campus. By far the most common outreach effort (81% of respondents), is college collaboration with government vocational rehabilitation agencies. In descending order, the next areas are: high school counselor outreach (69.3%); collaboration with community organizations (56.2%); collaboration with non-governmental vocational rehabilitation agencies... (p. 7).

Barnett's (1997) references to the connections with persons beyond the campus should not be construed to denote activities that are superfluous. As mentioned in the previous section, partnerships with rehabilitation agencies and secondary schools have become an integral part of the student's total, ongoing educational process, before,

during, and after these students complete their community college experiences. To illustrate this point, consider the following example that now occurs with increasing frequency. Many faculty and students refer themselves to disabilities support services offices requesting accommodations and help for what they suspect as learning disorders. As noted previously, community colleges are not required by law to provide psychological or diagnostic evaluations, nor are accommodations for learning disabilities required unless a current diagnosis or evaluation is furnished. These learning disabilities evaluations can be expensive to obtain ($300-500) if a student does not have one already available from high school. In the Virginia Community College System (and many other states), the Disability Support Services contact person can often refer such students to the local Department of Rehabilitative Services agency contact, and obtain the evaluation free of charge (provided that the student is also willing to become a Department of Rehabilitative Services client if the diagnosis reveals a learning disability). This example is cited to demonstrate that outreach with rehabilitation agencies also frequently constitutes in-reach for students with disabilities. In other words, these hypothetical students may potentially gain in several important ways: first, they get a free diagnosis; next, these students can receive additional support services and funding to help them complete their educational/rehabilitation plans; and finally, they may receive professional job placement services upon graduation. In addition to proving the benefits of the seamless web collaboration referred to under outreach activities, this example should also serve to illustrate how critical it is for disability support personnel to be knowledgeable

and proficient in rehabilitation counseling techniques in order to properly provide accommodations in community colleges.

The preceding section provides some quantitative data regarding the so-called big picture; what community colleges are doing (or not doing) collectively to serve students with disabilities nationally. But this perspective is missing a crucial element; how these services are impacting qualitatively upon students with disabilities. While there appears to be a relative paucity of qualitative studies that compare the effectiveness of such services in community colleges, there is some research that provides a glimmer of light on how students with disabilities are affected in general in higher education. Since the majority of students with disabilities attending postsecondary schools now enroll in community colleges relevant inferences may be made from the following data. The literature as a whole indicates that students with disabilities tend to have higher attrition rates than the general population of students (Wood & Lazzari, 1997). In Virginia, the Department of Education reported that in 1992, less than 20 percent of students with disabilities remained enrolled in their postsecondary programs 18 months after graduation from high schools (VA DOE, 1997).

What are some of the reasons that students with disabilities tend to have lower rates of persistence in college programs? Scott (1997) cites some of the following reasons as important contributing factors for the higher dropout rates of students with disabilities:

a. Characteristics/educational background of students (weakness in basic academic skills, inadequate knowledge of subject content, inability to self advocate. Limited independent self-management skills,

diverse needs that require a variety of support);

b. Characteristics of setting (increased academic expectations and competition, large student/instructor ratios, limited direct student/instructor contact, lack of needed supports, social isolation);

c. Emphasis at the secondary level on the school-to-work transition rather than on higher education (p. 47).

It has also been noted that students with disabilities require additional support services and specially trained providers (McGuire, Norlander, & Shaw, 1990). Despite this apparent critical need, it was noted in the American Association of Community Colleges survey that 20 percent of community colleges reporting still do not even appoint a Disabilities Support Services contact person (which is a minimum requirement of the Americans with Disabilities Act). Even if one takes the positive interpretation of this same data, and states that 80 percent of community colleges report having a disabilities support contact in 1995, Barnett (1996) points out that such persons hold a wide variety of job positions and titles as their primary responsibilities. Ipsen (1994) also notes that disabilities support services at some institutions are absent or inadequate with caseloads of special service providers as high as 557 identified students with disabilities. These references indicate that community colleges vary widely in the manner in which they staff and provide disabilities support assistance, despite the fact that these students require more special services, and that their numbers are also increasing dramatically.

If accommodating students with disabilities is such an important issue, why has the problem not been properly addressed by community colleges? Oddly enough, the answer

to this question is that some agencies and some community colleges have already addressed disabilities support services at length, and are already doing an effective job of responding to these challenges. Some valuable resources have been published to help counselors establish disability support services programs. This section will cite some of the more exemplary sources, and then list some of their collective recommendations.

The U.S. Department of Education has been actively involved in the quest for finding, publishing, and then disseminating credible information regarding the provision of appropriate services to students seeking postsecondary experiences in general, as well as literature specifically addressing the needs of community colleges. The funding for the majority of the American Association of Community College's pioneering efforts in this area has been furnished by the U.S. Department of Education. Starting with the Directory of Disability Support Services in Community Colleges in 1992, and continuing with the most recent edition in 1996, the American Association of Community Colleges has been actively engaged in the search for both defining the problems and the potential solutions for disability support services. In addition to its work with data collection, the American Association of Community Colleges is now also actively engaged in direct efforts to help community colleges implement programs to strengthen disability support services programs. The most relevant to this research is found in the American Association of Community Colleges Project Brief, describing Mentoring for Disability Support Services Program Development (Barnett, 1997). This Brief describes the project as follows:

> Staff from eight community colleges experimented with a team mentoring relationship to strengthen their programs for students with disabilities.

> Sponsored by the American Association of Community Colleges with support from the US Department of Education, the 1995-96 project explored ways that disability support services professionals could benefit from mentoring their peers in other institutions. From a national applicant pool of 47 colleges, four were selected to participate in the project. In a separate competitive process, Disability Support Services professionals from four additional colleges became the project mentoring team. Each mentor was paired with an individual college and its two-person team, consisting of a disabilities support services practitioner and a college administrator. The mentors became outside experts, neutral observers who could validate or advise (p. 1).

While each of the four community colleges participating in the projects reflected different populations and slightly different programmatic strategies, the collective findings were reported as "Mentoring Success Factors," and were described as the following: " Information sharing; mentor expertise/generosity focused planning; site visits, written guidelines; continuing network; team approach; American Association of Community Colleges and institutional support". It should be emphasized that one of the keys to the successes reported by this project was that each institution that participated provided administrative and financial support for their disability support services programs. One of the implications of this research is that administrative and financial support constitutes necessary (but not necessarily sufficient) conditions for providing adequate disability support services programs in community colleges.

The U.S. Department of Education is also actively involved in funding handbooks that present detailed and specific strategies for providing disabilities support services programs. While there are many examples of these types of handbooks in the literature, two of the best examples were published in Virginia. The first is a publication entitled Access to Success: Strategies for Serving Special Populations in Tech Prep Programs prepared under a grant awarded by Tech Prep in Virginia to the New River Valley Consortium, in cooperation with the Southwest Virginia Transition Center (Thuli,1995). Because, Tech Prep is a state-wide initiative to enhance communication between secondary and postsecondary programs that address the educational challenges of students from special populations in Virginia, New River Community College used funds to develop and implement the Learning Achievement Center Program (LEAP) that has become the best community college program for students with learning disabilities in the Virginia Community College System. Jeanne Anne Dixon, New River Community College's Project Director for LEAP has traveled widely across the Commonwealth, distributing a handbook reflective of this endeavor, and using it as an authoritative resource manual for other institutions in the Virginia Community College System who wish to improve and enhance their disability support service programs.

Project Access: A Training Manual for Special Service Providers is yet another excellent example of a publication specifically designed for disability support services programs by Wood and Lazzari of Virginia Commonwealth University School of Education in 1997. Virginia Commonwealth University published this comprehensive training manual with funds provided by a grant (once again) by the U. S. Department of

Education (1997). Project Access is actually the most current and extensive resource in the literature for use as an authoritative training manual to implement disability support services training programs in postsecondary education (Wood and Lazzari, 1997).

These sources, as well as others cited in the bibliography (Tutton, 1997), offer the following common sense recommendations to improve services to students with disabilities enrolling in postsecondary programs:

1. Formally assign and provide specialized training for disability support services providers.
   As Wood and Lazzari point out "...at some institutions, such supports are absent or inadequate" (1997, p. 4). As demonstrated by the American Association of Community Colleges survey, the majority of the responsibilities of Disability Support Services Personnel now fall within the realm of professional counseling (particularly rehabilitation counseling duties). It is therefore recommended that counselors have a major role in the provision of Disability Support Services programs if not formally appointed as the institution's official contact person for purposes of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
2. Publish and distribute a disability handbook to faculty support staff and administrators.
   The publication and distribution of a manual or handbook is a useful method of providing an authoritative reference regarding the college's policies regarding services and accommodations. It is critical that this handbook be supported by the CEO of the college and be adhered to by all parties as the document guiding all activities pertaining to disability support services.
3. Create a Committee on Disabilities on each campus.
   This committee should meet at least bi-annually, and serve as the college's official advisory body that reviews and recommends ways to raise the awareness of faculty and staff to disabilities issues, provide advice on policy matters, as well as strategies concerning the implementation of disability support services to students.
4. The disability support service office should seek to offer professional development workshops and training opportunities for the college's faculty and staff regarding disabilities.
   It is important that the nature of the training be carefully planned to fulfill the most relevant needs regarding disabilities at the campus. The advisory committee on disabilities should ideally be a participant in planning and implementing these opportunities for faculty and staff

> to learn more about serving the needs of students with disabilities. It should also be emphasized that the Disabilities Support Services Personnel are readily available to provide professional consultation on an individual or group basis if requested by faculty or staff.

Conclusion

This review of the literature has shown that, since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, community colleges have been challenged with providing educational services to the majority of the nation's students seeking postsecondary experiences. The data also strongly indicates that this trend will likely continue to grow well into the 21st Century, partially because of the open access nature of the system, but also because of special arrangements with secondary schools and rehabilitation agencies. The review of the literature cited in this chapter found that some exemplary programs do exist nationally, and a wide array of support services are being used to provide services to students with disabilities in community colleges. Although a wide array of support services are being used to accommodate students with disabilities, the literature indicates that wide disparities and inconsistent practices exist between community college service providers. The breadth and the scope of the differing missions of community colleges also contributes to the wide disparities in services to students with disabilities, thereby resulting in little consistency in the way that such institutions provide such services to students with disabilities (Symanski, E., et. al., 1999). Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, community college counselors providing services to students with disabilities have been challenged with rapidly increasing caseloads of students with disabilities. Additionally, since the majority of students with learning disorders are also enrolling in community colleges, Disabilities Support Services counselors in these institutions are struggling to cope with interpreting psychological evaluations in order to determine which services constitute appropriate accommodations.

Counselors tasked with providing services to students with disabilities in community colleges are struggling with inadequate system wide supports to meet the needs of these students.

CHAPTER III

Research Methodology

A Description of Naturalistic Inquiry

The purpose of this study is to conduct an analysis of the current structure of disabilities support services in the Virginia Community College System. Given this purpose, this research uses a qualitative technique called naturalistic inquiry. Naturalistic inquiry has been referred to as holistic inquiry carried out in a natural setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This methodology is particularly congruent with the purpose of this study because it is described as field research in which the investigator tries to study the elements in the setting in which the inquiry takes place, according to Lincoln & Guba, (1985). This methodology is also "rooted in an emergent paradigm which purposes that all aspects of reality are interrelated like a whole cloth" (Erlandson et. al., 1993. p. 21). The emergent paradigm makes very different assumptions about reality, objectivity, generalization, causality, and the role of values (Miller, 1996). A naturalistic study, therefore, provides the tools for this researcher to accomplish a better understanding of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System.

Naturalistic inquiries seek to explain, understand, and express the complexity of social processes. Researchers using this qualitative method also believe that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed and these realities cannot be studied in pieces, but rather must be studied holistically and in context (Miller, 1996). Miller (1996), described the following five characteristics of naturalistic inquiry that makes naturalistic inquiry a particularly appropriate methodology for this study:

1. Naturalistic Inquiries use inductive data analysis to draw generalizations. Instead of testing a preconceived hypothesis, the qualitative researcher studies the data inductively in order to reveal unanticipated outcomes. In this method, the researcher first gathers the data, and then tries to develop an understanding and draw generalizations from them.
2. Studies using the naturalistic method rely upon the development of grounded theory. Grounded theory (theory that is developed from the data) is viewed as superior, because it will more accurately reflect the data.
3. In this qualitative technique, the design emerges as the research progresses. In naturalistic designs, the investigation starts with a tentative design and develops as the study unfolds.
4. In this method, the subjects play a role in interpreting the outcomes. The qualitative researcher attempts to reconstruct reality from the frame of reference of the subjects. It therefore stands to reason that the respondents may in some cases be better able than the investigator to understand the complex interactions that have been observed, and account for the influence of local values on these interactions.
5. This technique is inherently value-bound. The researcher brings to the study all aspects of his or her experiences. These experiences influence the way in which the researcher and the respondents view the data and interpret it in the context of the inquiry.
6. Finally, Naturalistic Inquiry places emphasis on the study of social processes. Qualitative studies focus upon social processes and the meanings that participants attribute to social situations (pp. 47 – 49).

This section provides a description of the characteristics of naturalistic inquiry. All of the characteristics cited above are components that are directly relevant to the type of study undertaken in this project. This qualitative methodology is therefore particularly congruent with the goal of this study: to provide a qualitative analysis of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System. The techniques of the methodology pertaining to research design, data collection, and analysis of the data are described in the remainder of this chapter.

Research Design

Studies using naturalistic inquiry are based upon an emergent design. The method of inquiry follows the form of successful iterations around the following components:

purposive sampling, inductive analysis, grounded theory, and the projection of next steps (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus it is not possible to specify all of the design elements of a naturalistic study, as the design emerges as the study unfolds. The analysis of the data occurs as it is collected. This is not meant to infer that this method of inquiry proceeds without structure and planning. Several techniques are used to determine the focus of the inquiry, the appropriateness of the methodology to the inquiry, and the techniques that will be employed to provide an analysis of the data.

Human as Instrument

Because naturalistic inquiries studies reflect multiple realities, an instrument that is capable of sorting, recognizing, and honoring those realities, and "capable not only of distinguishing those subtleties of meaning, but assessing the role of that meaning in shaping behavior" is essential (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.142). The human inquirer is that instrument and the primary means of data collection.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified six characteristics of the human as instrument. The human as a instrument is responsive: he or she can sense and respond to all personal and environmental cues. The human as an instrument is adaptable. The human as an instrument can expand the borders of the questions brought into the inquiry, while keeping the responses within study boundaries. Humans are the only ones capable of realizing a holistic emphasis: they can consider multiple realities simultaneously and understand how the context of the study shapes behavior and influences reality construction. The human as an instrument has the ability to interpret, formulate hypotheses, and to collect and process data simultaneously.

The techniques of naturalistic inquiry, such as observing social settings, and analyzing responses of experts, require a human observer (Miller, 1996). As a participant-observer conducting the research in this study, I brought to this study the ability to perform as that human observer. With over a quarter of a century of professional counseling experience and education, I brought the ability to interpret the responses of the conference participants, as well as the authoritative literature regarding this subject, in order to build insights, form generalizations and to develop hypotheses from the study.

At the same time, however, I also bring the ability to color the data in order to fit my preconceived notions of the multiple realities of the respondents and data. In other words, I also have the ability to bias the findings of the data collected. In fact, this type of qualitative research is even more susceptible to the dangers of such contamination (subjective bias) than many of the quantitative designs offered to researchers. Therefore, it was necessary for me to constantly step back from the research environment and consider how I might structure the emerging design in order to prevent my biases from contaminating the data. As I discuss data collection techniques in the next section, I will also address some of the methods that I utilized to exert some controls over contamination of the findings of the data through subjectivity.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected in two distinct phases. Phase one consisted of collecting the responses and data obtained from participants in the Virginia Community College System Conference on Disabilities Support Services. Phase two consisted of an

analysis of current findings in the literature as it directly related to the four focus issues that subsequently evolved from phase one.

Phase One: Responses from the Virginia Community College System Conference on Disabilities Workgroups

Boundaries of the Study.

In studies using naturalistic inquiry, the research is bounded by such elements as theoretical perspectives, logistics, and the values of the researcher. The boundaries of the study are driven by theories developed from the data rather than by a priori theoretical formulations (Miller, 1996). These boundaries are determined mutually by and negotiated between the researcher and the respondents as the data is collected and simultaneously analyzed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The boundaries of this study, which are discussed below:

1. The research was first limited to a purposive sampling of the theoretical perspectives of 36 counselors attending the Virginia Community College System Conference on Disabilities Support Services which was held in Richmond, Virginia, on June 11,1999. It was during this conference that I began my research for phase one in the role of a participant observer. This conference, which was sponsored by the Virginia Community College Systems, was requested by counselors in the Virginia Community College System, in order to develop recommendations to improve services to students with disabilities (Williams, 1999). The common goal of this conference was therefore to develop positive future strategies to improve special services for

students with disabilities. The participants began this process by developing four focus issues/concerns they felt required investigation. These four focus issues/questions are cited in detail in the findings in Chapter Four of this dissertation. I deduced the development of these four issues represented a consensus of professional theoretical perspectives of the conference participants. By virtue of this initial analysis, I decided to adopt these issues as the four focus questions under investigation in this study. Thus, the theoretical perspectives of the participants contributed to the initial research questions as the direction of the design unfolded. It should be noted here that the researcher received permission from the members of the Workgroup to use the proceedings of the conference, and it's subsequent efforts as data for my doctoral project beforehand, in the role of a participant-observer.

2. Logistics became the second boundary issue for both the researcher and the study participants. The 36 counselors participating represented 14 community colleges all across Virginia. Time and geography were therefore mutual logistical boundaries for both the researcher and the study participants. To accommodate the logistical concerns of time and geography, it was therefore decided to divide the 36 participants into four workgroups, each charged with responding to one of the specific focus questions previously identified. Oral instructions to this effect were first provided to the entire group before lunch. To ensure clarity and consistency of purpose of the task, written instructions were also

provided to each of the workgroup participants at the beginning of their breakout session. The workgroups were therefore each charged with discussing their focus issue in the afternoon session before the conclusion of the conference. Each workgroup was then additionally charged with submitting their final written findings to the ad hoc workgroup in one month.

3. The values that the researcher and the subjects bring to the process were a major boundary for this study. In a naturalistic study the values of both the researcher and the respondents are recognized and accepted. Values actually influence the research setting, the theoretical perspectives, and the methodology. As a counselor serving students with disabilities for over 25 years, my values strongly influenced my selection of this topic. Additionally, the values of these counselors brought them to participate in the conference, and therefore serve as respondents in this study. All of the counselors volunteered to attend this conference for a common purpose: "to improve and enhance accessibility of services to students with disabilities." This was admittedly a biased sample of the population. In contrast to qualitative designs, this population's biases served as strengths rather than as weaknesses in terms of the rich experiences and data they represented. In this type of inquiry, these values represent fertile fields from which to harvest rich data. Thus a critical element to this study is the data collected from the four workgroups serving as expert panelists. As has been discussed in this section the researcher utilized internal controls to minimize the risk of

allowing his or her values to contaminate the findings. It should therefore be emphasized that the researcher chose not to participate in the deliberations of any of the four workgroups in order to prevent any contamination of the data.

Phase Two: Analysis of Relevant Studies

This phase of the study involved a review and analysis of the professional literature for current studies and research data that bear directly upon the four focus questions/issues that were identified in phase one. Since the purpose of this study was to analyze the structure of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System, it was apparent that such an analysis would have been deficient without taking into consideration data obtained from the "multiple realities" of other perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The primary objective of this phase was to review other findings as a method to compare the generalizations drawn by the respondents in phase one. Despite the rich experience base offered by the multiple realities of counselors as expert panelists, their responses are theoretical perspectives drawn from the standpoint of providing support services to students in their respective service areas. While this feedback is valuable for the purpose of this study, it might be said that any generalizations or hypotheses drawn from these respondents represent a microcosmic view of disability support services. By reviewing other sources of data, particularly those with a wider population pool, useful macrocosmic comparisons may be drawn. Also, since this study is a qualitative inquiry, providing additional studies and findings that have employed qualitative methods and controls provides a useful method of comparing the validity of the generalizations evolving from phase one. Therefore,

data for phase two is provided from such authoritative sources as the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports Rehabilitation Research & Training Center, the American Association of Community Colleges, The Commonwealth of Virginia's Higher Education Workgroup, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, and the like.

There was an additional objective for the presentation of the data presented in Phase II. It was also stated in the purpose of this study that it was hoped that the findings would be used by the Virginia Community College System, and the Higher Education Workgroup in order to improve and enhance counseling services to students with disabilities. The responses obtained from the counselors contain problem statements regarding current services, as well as recommendations posed as potential solutions to those issues. This study, therefore, includes the most current information available with respect to providing support services to disabilities. Since the workgroup cited a goal of attempting to improve the accessibility of services to students with disabilities in the Virginia Community College System, this phase cites information that could be used by the Virginia Community College System to achieve this goal.

Summary

This chapter contains a description of the methods and procedures used in conducting this study. Clearly articulated is a description of the characteristics of naturalistic inquiry, and the specific application of this qualitative methodology to fulfill the purposes of this research design.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation and Analysis of the Data

The presentation and analysis of the data in this chapter is organized into four distinct sections. These four sections correspond to the four focus questions cited in Chapter Three. Each section begins by presenting the concern, and then discussing how the respondents viewed the impact of that issue on their ability to provide counseling services to students with disabilities. The original selection of the four focus issues was made by 44 conference participants, prior to breaking out into four workgroups comprised of a total of 36 participants representing 16 community colleges. The topics selected and the conference discussions of each of these four areas are considered significant data because, like a projective test, they represent the multiple realities and perceptions of counselors serving students with disabilities. As such, it has been treated as a source of data for the purposes of this study.

Following the observations of the large group discussion on each concern, the summaries of each of the four workgroups will be presented in tables as data. Each workgroup summary cites the objective, the actual names of the members, their observations and comments, followed by the workgroup's recommendations to address the concern.

Finally, I will present my analysis of the data for each focus area, inclusive of citations or authoritative sources that provide information relevant to each area

from a review of the literature. The use of other findings and data in the analysis of each concern is considered important for this qualitative study for three reasons. First, it provides additional information that is relevant to the topic and therefore may be used as resource data by counselors who are either starting new disability support services programs, or those personnel who wish to improve and enhance existing support services with disabilities at their community college campuses. These findings will also be presented to the Virginia Community College System and Higher Education Workgroups, with the hope that administrators and other personnel will use the data to implement some constructive changes to address specific problem areas. Third, the study is also enriched by comparing findings and data from perspectives other than those of the key stakeholders (Disability Support Services counselors). The comparison of perspectives is one aspect, but much of the data from the literature is quantitative. Despite the use of this qualitative methodology as the design that is most congruent for the purposes of this study, the controls used in some of the quantitative studies cited provide balance to this study's use of the qualitative method of naturalistic inquiry and strengthens the research findings.

Focus Concern I: Documentation Standards

Large Group Discussion and Observations

In the large group discussions the counselors observed that there are wide variances in the manner in which disability support services personnel accept documentation, particularly regarding Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders, and other psychological disorders. This theme branched into several discussions. The

first was on the variances in the standards accepted by different agencies and colleges, as it relates to psychological disorders, particularly with respect to diagnosing Learning Disorders. Some of the counselors stated their concerns regarding the difficulties their clients had experienced in securing current psychological evaluations from high schools. One counselor indicated that he had been successful in getting the high school to do an updated psychological on seniors who knew they would be attending his college in the next year. Another counselor countered by stating that some high schools had refused her attempts to do so because they can get by with using an old evaluation. Also discussed were the variances in what was considered to be an acceptable period for an evaluation to be decided as current or outdated. While some colleges require that "current" means a diagnostic report written within the last three to four years. Some of the counselors discussed the types of test instruments that were considered to be adequate for different diagnoses, as well as the types of credentials or professional qualifications the diagnostician should possess. A few of the counselors confessed that they lacked adequate training to make any of these determinations, and they expressed the desire for the Virginia Community College System to mandate consistent standards. Some counselors felt that possible legal conflicts existed with Virginia Community College System policies regarding "ability-to-benefit provisions". Specifically, one counselor felt that if she refused an applicant because of the Virginia Community College System policy regarding "ability-to-benefit" provisions for mentally retarded students, she feared the potential for lawsuits for violating the Americans with Disabilities Act. Several of the counselors repeated their concern that they did not have the training to enable them to

interpret psychological reports in order to prescribe reasonable accommodations. Most participants voiced the opinion that this function should be a basic service provided by Disabilities Support Providers. A consensus was reached by the group that there should be professional training provided on documentation standards and applications to ensure uniformity and consistency for all members of the Virginia Community College System.

At the conclusion of the large group discussion, counselors from seven community colleges were tasked with meeting in small workgroup sessions to work on documentation concerns. This workgroup was specifically charged to formulate recommendations to address the concerns identified by the conference participants. Table 2 presents the observations and recommendations submitted by the members of the ad hoc workgroup regarding documentation concerns.

Table 2

Observations and Recommendations of Workgroup

Objective To facilitate consistency of documentation requirements

Workgroup members: Pamela Kiker, Reginia Massey, Marilyn Starkes, Lisa Wilson, Sue Rice, Kerren McDougal, Philicia Wilson.

A. Observations
   1. Schools, agencies and colleges are using different definitions for learning disability
   2. Requirements under IDEA are causing problems for students transitioning

B. Recommendations
   1. VCCS colleges need to collaborate with one another and with Virginia AHEAD to establish uniformity in guidelines for documenting a disability
   2. Documentation should reflect AHEAD standards
   3. Referral list of diagnosticians maintained
   4. Counselors and providers need training in interpreting documentation to identify appropriate accommodations
   5. Establish guidelines for intra-system transfer of documentation

C. Other Comments

VCCS needs to define who is a qualified student and who would be an "otherwise qualified" community college student. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States . . . shall be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. To be in compliance with Section 504, colleges must determine who is an otherwise qualified student with a disability. This will enable counselors to utilize limited resources more effectively. VCCS must provide guidance to counselors and providers to distinguish between the otherwise qualified student with a disability and the student who does not have the "ability-to-benefit," or who is not a qualified community college student.

Source: Williams (1999)

Analysis of Documentation Concerns

It is apparent from both the group discussion and the efforts of this workgroup that several significant themes emerged with respect to documentation. The first theme that emerged was the level of awareness reached on the part of the counselors that wide variances do exist among colleges with respect to the handling of students who request support services for Learning Disabilities and other psychological disorders. Many of them knew some differences existed before the conference, but these discussions proved that the differences were much more pronounced across the colleges in the Virginia Community College System than any of the counselors had thought.

This systems-wide perspective led to the group's concerns that constructive steps needed to taken to ensure uniformity and consistency among community colleges. However, while there was consensus that uniformity and consistency needed to be achieved, there was divergence of opinion with respect on how to go about achieving this objective. Most counselors seemed to agree that they should all adopt the use of the AHEAD standards (see Table 3). The divergence on this issue was how they should go about arriving at this objective. Some counselors indicated they had already adopted these standards in their colleges. Many of the counselors stated that the Virginia Community College System should mandate some consistent documentation standard, while others felt that they could accomplish adoption of the AHEAD Guidelines cited in Table 3 at their institutions.

Table 3

Draft: Guidelines for Documentation of Disability

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to assist institutions with the process of developing and maintaining consistent, comprehensive, and appropriate guidelines for documenting disabilities and requests for accommodations. This information should provide a framework within which institutions can establish (or review existing) policies and procedures that are adapted to their specific context while embracing both spirit and letter of the law.

This document is not meant to be used as a "boiler-plate" for a institution's policies, but rather as a common framework for policy development and policy review. This document also is not meant to be a legal treatise and it should not be considered legal advice. Institutions are encouraged to consult with their legal counsel before implementing new policies on documentation.

The Need for Documentation:

Under Federal and State law, individuals with disabilities are defined as having "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; a recorded of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment." Individuals with disabilities are protected from discrimination and are entitled to reasonable accommodations for the impact of their disability. Therefore, documentation serves two primary purposes in post secondary education. First, documentation must establish that the student has, or has been considered to have, a disability, and therefore is protected from discrimination. Second, the documentation must describe the functional impact of the disability so that potential accommodations can be identified.

General Documentation Guidelines:

Documentation of disability should consist of an evaluation by an appropriate professional. Included must be a clear statement of the diagnosis, the basis for the diagnosis, and the current impact of the disability as it relates to the accommodation request. As appropriate to the disability, the documentation should include the following elements:

1) A diagnostic statement identifying the disability, date of the most current diagnostic evaluation, and the date of the original diagnosis.
2) A description of the diagnostic tests, methods, and/or criteria used including specific test results and the examiner's narrative interpretation.
3) A description of the current functional impact of the disability. This may be in the form of an examiner's narrative, a personal narrative, and/or an interview, but must have a rational relationship

to diagnostic assessments.

4) A statement indicating treatments, medications, or assistive devices/services currently prescribed or in use, with a description of the mediating effects and potential side effects from such treatments.
5) A description of the expected progression or stability of the impact of the disability over time, particularly the next five years.
6) A history of previous accommodations and their impact.
7) The credentials of the diagnosing professional(s), if not clear from the letterhead or other forms.

Recommendations for accommodations, adaptive devices, assistive services, compensatory strategies, and/or collateral support services should be considered within the context of the student's current program. Accommodation decisions are to be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the impact of a particular student's disability within the specific context in which that student must function.

Beyond the more objective determination of disability and its impact provided by external documentation, institutions should recognize that the student with a disability also is a rich and important source of information on the impact of the disability, and on the effectiveness of accommodations.
Source: Reilly (1999)

The next significant theme that was cited in recommendation number four was that "Counselors need awareness and training in interpreting documentation to identify appropriate accommodations" (Williams, 1999). Throughout the conference process it became apparent to the group that professional development training needs to be provided for counselors specifically to enhance their ability to identify accommodations from diagnostic evaluations. The only divergence on this issue regarded how counselors could obtain this training. Some wanted the Virginia Community College System to provide it, while others pointed out specific examples of graduate courses in counseling that are available across the state that they could take to acquire these skills.

The final item in this section, recommendation number five, was "to establish guidelines for intra-system transfer of documentation" (Williams, 1999). There was no divergence on how to implement this recommendation. There was consensus that the Virginia Community College System should mandate the transfer of documentation, provided that such documentation meets the standards defined by AHEAD (Reilly, 1999).

Both Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans With Disabilities Act are clear that postsecondary institutions may require adequate documentation of a disability and the need for accommodations, and once obtained, these institutions must provide accommodations to the extent required by these laws (Gephart, 2000). The clarity of these basic legal mandates, however, clouds the level of confusion that often exists on the part of counselors who are attempting to determine what types of procedures should be used in verifying disability support services in postsecondary institutions.

Nationally, only 72 percent of all colleges required verification of students with disabilities, according to the United States Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1998). Table 4 provides a comparison of survey data that demonstrates the wide variety of practices that exists nationally with respect to documentation requirements (NCES, 1998).

Table 4

Verification Distribution Survey

Percent of 2-year and 4-year postsecondary education institutions enrolling students with disabilities in 1996-97 and 1997-98 that require verification of student disabilities, and what those institutions accept as verification, by institutional characteristics.

		Forms of Verification				
Institutional characteristic	Require Verification	Medical Evaluation/ Statement	Psychological Evaulation/ Statement	Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Evaluation	Testing or formal evaluation by your instituiton's DSS office or coordinator	Informal evaluation or determination by your institution's DSS office or coordinator
All institutions	84	94	92	77	22	23
Institutional type						
Public 2-year	89	93	93	87	29	30
Private 2-year	59	78	64	76	13	21
Public 4-year	99	99	100	83	26	19
Private 4-year	84	98	96	64	16	17

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Postsecondary Education Quick Information System, Survey on Students with Disabilities at Postsecondary Education Institutions, 1998

These figures provide a comparison of the percentage of 2-year and 4-year institutions enrolling students with disabilities that did require verification, as well as what these colleges accepted as documentation during the survey period (1996-98). According to this NCES survey (1998), while community colleges were more likely (89%) to require verification, what these institutions accepted as appropriate documentation differed significantly. For example, while only 29 percent of the disability support services counselors in 2-year colleges reported they actually provided the evaluation as a direct service, only 30 percent required an informal review of documentation (NCES, 1998).

Given the wide variations in the documentation standards used by Disability Support Services personnel nationally, it is, therefore, not surprising that the 36 Disability Support Services Counselors participating in this study expressed concerns regarding documentation practices in the Virginia Community College System. The above national figures support the findings of this study that the institutions within the Virginia Community College System are at best inconsistent with respect to the standards used to provide access to special services for students with disabilities. Even more disturbing is the feedback from some counselors regarding the absence of education or training available for these service providers to adequately interpret documentation, particularly that of a psychological nature, such as learning disabilities, and Attention Deficit Disorder.

The feedback from the participants of this study also indicates that there were some disabilities support counselors in community colleges in Virginia that were unable to

fulfill even the most basic functions of determining initial eligibility or adequately interpreting such documentation to determine which accommodations are appropriate. As stated previously, both of these basic functions are required of disability support providers in postsecondary institutions by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

Errors committed on the part of counselors in determining eligibility for disability support services harms community colleges in at least three important ways. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is the potential for such errors to result in the denial of access to services urgently needed by students with disabilities. It is obvious that such denial of services violates the aforementioned federal laws, and can thus result in potential litigation by the United States Office of Civil Rights. Such errors also pose potential failures for such institutions to fulfill their mission statements to members of their communities or service areas.

The third potential consequence of such errors is that of providing access to special academic adjustments for students who are legally unqualified for such services. To cite one of the actual examples discussed in the group session by counselors participating in this study of the mentally challenged, non-high school graduates were permitted to enroll in academic curricula for which they would otherwise be determined ineligible due to inability-to-benefit provisions. In this example, the community college counselors permitted the unqualified students access to academic programs and support services because, as they disclosed at the conference, they were afraid that the parents would file a lawsuit if they denied such access. Providing students with access to special adjustments

for which they would not otherwise be qualified harms community colleges in at least two important ways. The first is the needless added resources expended by community colleges for providing the extra support services required to sustain students who should never have been admitted in the first place. The second harm is the potential to compromise the quality and integrity of the academic processes and coursework in order to preclude legal action. In addition to the issue of the erosion of academic integrity, such actions pose harm to all community college students, regardless of disability status.

The recommendation of the counselors in this study to adopt the documentation standards compiled by AHEAD is, therefore, a crucial first step in resolving this critical issue. Furthermore, the recent action on the part of the Higher Education Workgroup of Virginia (March, 2000) to make this same recommendation directly to all state supported colleges validates this finding and recommendation.

It is the position of this study that the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System should endorse and adopt the recommendation of the Higher Education Workgroup to adopt the AHEAD standards for documentation to all 23 member institutions. Similarly, it is also recommended that the Virginia Community College System provide support for training disability support providers on how to interpret and utilize these documentation standards in all 23 colleges across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Finally, the endorsement of these standards and subsequent coordination of training would also facilitate the ability of the Virginia Community College System to implement an "intra-system transfer of documentation." Implementation of these three

actions would facilitate the ability of community colleges in Virginia to achieve their goal of consistency in providing access to students with disabilities.

Focus Concern II: Core Services

Large Group Discussions of Core Services

There was a great deal of discussion by the participants regarding specific types of disability support services that the counselors should be making available at all campuses. Much of this discussion concerned the impact of how the various services were mandated by existing laws, with the Americans with Disabilities Act mentioned specifically. With respect to the Americans with Disabilities Act, a significant amount of discussion took place regarding the need for counselors to be trained in the interpretation of psychological and psycho-educational tests. The debate took place once again regarding whether or not it was a core service requirement for counselors to be able to administer and interpret psychological tests in order to prescribe "reasonable accommodations" for students with Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorders, and Mental Disorders. Several counselors felt that it was not a core requirement to administer psychological testing for diagnostic purposes at community colleges but that it should be a core practice to refer such clients to resources with qualified personnel to conduct psychometric evaluations. Several examples of referrals were discussed, including the availability of diagnostic reports free of charge from the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services and other public service agencies. It was emphasized that high schools could arrange for a school psychological to be done on seniors who would be transferring to community colleges in the future. For example,

some of the counselors indicated the need to be more responsive to those students who are referred by faculty and staff who suspect that their students may have Learning Disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or other psychological disorders. While disability support services counselors at community colleges are not responsible for providing psychological evaluations, they are expected as counselors to help these students by providing them with, as the workgroup pointed out in recommendation number three, a current "Referral list of diagnosticians" (Williams, 1999). It was also discussed how counselors could specifically facilitate this referral process, based upon the nature of the client's presenting problems. In some cases, it is appropriate for the counselor to conduct a direct referral to a specific agency and/or source. For example it was mentioned that some counselors had negotiated with some local government agencies to provide psychological evaluations free of charge for clients demonstrating financial need.

Regardless of the results of the diagnosis, however, it is imperative for the counselor to recommend support services and resources existing within the college that will enhance the students' academic success such as the following: tutorial services, study skills and test-taking seminars, academic support centers, etc. Thus, some of the counselors, particularly the newly assigned ones, learned some important basic professional functions from the conference.

The previous discussion generated a concern on the part of some of the counselors for the need for persons selected as disability support counselors to have better training and or experience. Some of the participants observed that they had been assigned the

responsibility for providing services to students with disabilities with little or no background or training in this field. Many of these counselors expressed frustration with what they perceived to be a lack of training or guidance in their new assignments, with the exception of consultation with more experienced colleagues at other campuses. Some of the counselors noted that there were courses available in some graduate programs that were useful in this regard. It was noted however, that most graduate programs in counseling lacked sufficient preparation or credentials to adequately prepare disability support services providers for the challenges faced in community college settings. It was observed by some of the participants that the role that had emerged for disability support services in community colleges since the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act was similar to that of the school psychologist in secondary education following the passage of Public Law 91-142 (1973). It was also recommended that personnel selected for these positions in the future complete coursework such as psychometrics, diagnosis and treatment planning, rehabilitation counseling, and an internship or comparable experience in disabilities support settings in postsecondary settings.

A significant amount of time was spent discussing the need to provide assistive devices as core services for clients. Examples of different technologies, applications, and the uses for different disabilities were discussed. Some of the discussion involved whether or not some of these assistive devices should be a core requirement at all colleges. While the majority of the participants stated these devices were often needed for specific clients, there was not a consensus that they should be required as a core service for the entire Virginia Community College System.

There was consensus on the part of the participants with respect to the Virginia Community College System providing system-wide leadership, guidelines, and collaboration for the provision of disability support services at each campus. Many of the counselors indicated that they should not be placed in the uncomfortable position of determining which services and policies should be in place at their campuses. Many indicated that their deans and presidents lacked the technical experience and knowledge base to make such decisions. Some of the participants felt that the Virginia Community College System should provide a specific unit within itself to provide technical consultation and collaboration for Disability Support Services counselors. The participants were, however, unanimous that the Virginia Community College System should make available legal advice and collaboration regarding disability support services policies to each campus.

At the conclusion of the large group discussion, counselors from six community colleges met in small workgroup sessions to work on core services concerns. This work group proposed recommendations to address the concerns that had been identified by the conference participants. Table 5 presents the observations and recommendations that were subsequently submitted by the members of the ad hoc workgroup to address core services concerns (Williams, 1999).

Table 5

Ad-Hoc Workgroup Report: Core Services

Objective II: To identify core services

A. Observations
   1. There is a need for a designated VCCS unit that will provide guidelines and statewide leadership with the collaboration of disability service providers at each campus.
   2. There is a need for counselors who work with students with disabilities to have prior experience and training relative to disability services.
   3. There is a need for assistive technology that allows students to perform routine tasks independently.

B. Recommendations
   1. Designate a VCCS unit that will provide guidelines and statewide leadership with the collaboration of disability service providers at each campus.
   2. An identifiable office or department with full-time employees to coordinate disability services/activites.
   3. An overall coordinator for multi-campus to manage site coordinators/providers and to maintain consistency and quality of services.
   4. Assistive technology to minimally include the following:
      a. Adaptive computer workstations with adjustable tables;
      b. Large screen monitors;
      c. Adaptive keyboards and mouse;
      d. Text-scanning software with voice output;
      e. Voice control software for hands free operation;
      f. Text-enlarging software with voice output;
      g. Software with assistance with writing;
      h. 2-track/4-track cassette tape recorders;
      i. Speaking electronic dictionary/thesaurus;
      j. Assistive listening device;
      k. CCTV;
      l. TDD;
      m. Captioning services.
   5. Other services to include:
      a. Alternative testing/adaptive testing (to include alternate forms of placement tests);
      b. Interpreters;
      c. Notetakers;
      d. Scribes;
      e. Adapted materials;
      f. Physical Accessibility to buildings and rooms;
      g. Access to tutorial programs as offered for general population;

h. Priority registration.

6. East/West VCCS interpreter regional coordinators need to seek feedback from campus disability service providers to identify interpreting needs.
7. Guidelines are needed for handling full time requirement status for students with disability for medical insurance purposes.
8. To provide information and technical support to enhance utilization of the federal recruitment program for students with disabilities.
9. Provide information on disabilities in the workplace and technical standards for students as part of the campus career services component.
10. Implement recommendations from the VCCS on tracking procedures.

Source: Williams (1999).

Analysis of Core Services Concerns

It was apparent from the feedback on this issue that the majority of counselors do not feel comfortable with their capacity to render some of the decisions that involve the legal and technical ramifications of providing counseling services to students with disabilities. This perception was particularly apparent with the workgroups' first recommendation:

> There is a need for a designated Virginia Community College Systems unit that will provide guidelines and statewide leadership with the collaboration of Disability Support Services at each campus.

The group discussions also specified examples of legal issues or concerns that have taken place on campuses for which counselors expressed the need for someone else to "make the call."

I have been advised by Mr. Joseph Barden of the Office of Student Services Support for the Virginia Community College System, that an attorney from the Virginia Attorney-General's Office has recently been appointed who will serve as a consultant for all of the colleges in the Virginia Community College System regarding any legal issues/concerns arising from disability support services. While the provision of an attorney to serve as a consultant does offer a partial solution to the problem, it does not provide the "direct guidelines and leadership" regarding core issues, and basic services that these counselors were requesting.

The most pervasive theme that evolved from the discussion is that these counselors wanted the Virginia Community College System to step forward in some fashion and provide definitive guidelines regarding core services that counselors should follow in

providing services for students with disabilities. The Association on Higher Education and Disability has been working on that very same goal since 1995. Based upon empirical data involving more than 1,000 postsecondary professionals, AHEAD has just published Program Standards for Offices for Students with Disabilities (Reilly, 1999). These 27 Program Standards consisting of nine categories have been identified as essential for Disability Support Services providers in all postsecondary institutions. I emphasize that these standards have been developed by virtue of rigorous review by the leading professional development organization that serves students with disabilities. A copy of these Program Standards is therefore provided in Appendix B as a valuable resource to resolve this issue by providing parameters that meet the letter and the spirit of the law. Therefore, to achieve the consistency of core services that these counselors were seeking, the Program Standards should be adopted as their guide to providing disabilities support services to students in the Virginia Community College System.

Recommendation number two is significant because it highlights a major concern with respect to this analysis: "[Each community college should have] an identifiable office or department with full-time employees to coordinate disabilities services activities" (Williams, 1999). As pointed out in the review of the literature, the Americans with Disabilities Act (1991) mandated that each college designate an employee that is readily accessible to handle the issues and concerns of students with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act does not specify that the employee needs to be full-time, but the person should be readily identifiable and accessible to both students and staff. A survey completed by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities shows that only 44

percent of the community colleges responding, indicated they have offices exclusively devoted to students with disabilities (2000). In contrast, the survey revealed that 91 percent of the public colleges and universities had an office exclusively devoted to students with disabilities (2000). The fact that there are so many campuses in the Virginia Community College System where this is not the case is troubling; however, it is also viewed as positive that the counselors see this as an area where they could improve the quality of core services to their clients.

With respect to the discussion of assistive devices, technologies, and accommodation support services that should be available for students with disabilities, two significant themes were prevalent. First, it was apparent that some of the counselors from smaller campuses were learning about the availability of some of these newer technological innovations for the first time, thus some constructive learning was taking place for many of the participants. This perspective may be viewed as significant because it reinforces the need for professional development training discussed previously.

The second theme that emerged on this issue was that agreement was reached not only on the name of specific devices that should be available, but also a list of core services that should also be available as core services on all campuses, refer to recommendation number four (Williams, 1999).

It appears somewhat surprising that such a definitive list of core services was recommended for all campuses, particularly in light of the concerns expressed regarding the expense of these assistive devices/services. My theory regarding this outcome is that, because of the dialogue at the conference, the counselors shifted their opinion. They

shifted their focus to recommend what was viewed as best for their clients (as well as compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act). This shift contrasted their original issue of reluctance to their recommendations because of the burden placed on their colleges by the high costs associated with these assistive devices and core services.

Focus Concern III: Systems-Wide Coordination

Large Group Discussions of Systems-Wide Coordination

The discussion by the counselors regarding statewide resources centered primarily on allocating expensive services and resources that are needed to provide appropriate accommodations. One of the first comments by one of the counselors was that a pool of money needed to be made available by the state for allocating resources and services to institutions in the Virginia Community College System. For example, a great deal of emphasis was placed upon the problems in both finding and paying for qualified interpreters to accommodate students who are deaf and hard of hearing. For example, one counselor indicated that his college had expended over $300,000 on interpreter services in the current fiscal period resulting in a budget deficit for the institution. Some counselors suggested that a pool of money, or a separate allocation, should be made available by the state from which these expenses could be covered without causing undue burdens on smaller colleges. This category did differ from the funding issue, at least in the perspective of the participants, in that they needed statewide coordination for more than just acquiring funds. The counselors indicated that part of the problem is the issue of finding appropriately qualified personnel, particularly in remote areas of the state.

Some of the participants also discussed collaborating on these problems with other local state and community agencies and colleges to secure some of these services and share in the funding. For example, one of the counselors mentioned that professional development training sessions could be coordinated with other colleges or agencies that also served the needs of students with disabilities.

At the conclusion of the large group discussion, counselors from six community colleges met in small workgroup sessions to work on core services concerns. This work group formulated specific recommendations to address the concerns identified by the conference participants. Table 6 presents the observations and recommendations which were later submitted by the members of the ad hoc workgroup to address system wide coordination concerns.

Table 6

Ad-Hoc Workgroup Report: Statewide Coordination

Objective III: To articulate critical components for statewide coordination

Workgroup Members: Carol Avenson, Donald Baker, Donna Brody, Paula Dean, Jeananne Dixon, Lucy Howlett, Mike Henry, Elizabeth Martini, Gary Medlin

A. Observations
   1. Need a pool of money to fund services and a method for determining allocations.
   2. Lack of availability of qualified interpreters.
   3. Local colleges, universities, local schools and agencies need to work collaboratively on common goals for their region.

B. Recommendations
   1. Develop state-wide guidelines for interpreting services.
   2. Explore distance learning and interpreting alternatives.
   3. Facilitate transition conferences to include secondary schools.
   4. Establish a system for tracking and reporting student data to include student inquiries, students pending documentation and those with documented disabilities (An example of a tracking model from Tidewater Community College is attached.)
   5. Utilize the following vehicles for professional development & coordinating statewide services:
      a. VCCS – peer groups
      b. AHEAD – Association on Higher Education and Disability
      c. VCCA – Virginia Community Colleges Association
      d. Expand Local consortia – i.e. Tidewater Regional, ADA consortium.
      e. New Horizons – assistive technology training.
      f. Transition Form
      g. Virginia Association of Educational Opportunity
      h. Virginia Counselor Association
   6. Establish rapport with state agencies toward the development of consistency in services statewide:
      a. VDRS
      b. VDVH
      c. VDDHS
      d. Virginia Disability Services Board
   7. Develop VCCS college clusters for collaboration and sharing resources within a district.

Source: Williams (1999).

Analysis of Systems-Wide Coordination Concerns

My initial perception of the feedback on this area of concern was that, at least for the majority of the counselors, they were simply asking for additional funding and resources. My original impression was that this discussion was strongly related to the same concerns expressed in the focus area regarding funding and allocation of resources. Indeed, I drew this analysis directly from the concerns mentioned in Observations number 1: "Need a pool of money to fund [interpreter] services".... and Observations number 2: "Lack of availability of qualified interpreters" (Table 6). Both of these observations are valid concerns expressed by Disabilities Support Services providers. In fact, as will be noted at the end of this section, the efforts of the feedback from this Workgroup, and the Higher Education Workgroup, has finally resulted in creating systems wide relief to address these issues.

A closer examination of the data also reveals an additional theme beyond that of "just show me the money." It is my position that the disabilities support services counselors are also requesting coordination with any agencies or organizations assisting students with disabilities, who can also assist with knowledge in the form of professional consultation, expertise, and coordination. In other words, disabilities support services value the counseling technique of staffing problems with multi-disciplinary teams who can suggest several potential viewpoints or solutions from which to help students. This theme may be found in some of the feedback from the workgroup, but it is most obvious in all seven of the actual workgroup recommendations cited in Table 6. The succeeding section will therefore cite some of the recommendations below to demonstrate the need

for increased access to collaboration. It will also respond to some of the recommendations because many of the solutions to address them already exist. By making these solutions available to the counselors, this section can serve as a potential resource in the future.

For example, in the first recommendation, this workgroup asks to "develop state-wide guidelines for interpreting services" (Williams, 1999). Disabilities support services counselors in the Virginia Community College System should note that these guidelines already exist. The Virginia Department of the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing is responsible for providing guidance, resources, direction, and support to all agencies with respect to all services related to the deaf and hard of hearing. Included in that charge is the requirement that this agency publish clear guidance with respect to the various levels of qualifications appropriate for interpreters, and furthermore, these guidelines must be used with respect to the purchase and procurement agreements for interpreter services with all state agencies. These levels of credentials vary according to the complexity of the materials requiring interpretation. Since interpretation of college materials requires the translation of complex subject matter, the guidelines from the Virginia Department of the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing (1996) requires that at least an American Sign Language Level III Interpreter be employed for instruction of community college students. According to the VDD&HH (1996), the current charge for a Level III Interpreter is $49.00 per hour for the Greater Richmond Area. Thus, the expense borne by community colleges each year for providing interpreter services to students with severe hearing losses is extremely burdensome.

Focus Concern IV: Funding

Large Group Discussions on Funding

A great deal of the initial group discussion on funding centered upon the perception that most of the disabilities support systems programs in the Virginia Community College System are either entirely, or at least partially, sustained by grant funding. Several of the counselors noted that much of their time was expended in the grant process. A significant amount of discussion took place regarding the various types of federal, private and state resources that were currently being utilized by some of the institutions. Some of the participants explained that the process of searching for grant sources, writing proposals, and conducting required activities and reports, greatly interfered with their abilities to provide other disabilities support services. There appeared, however, to be a collective sense of ambivalence on the part of the participants regarding the use of grant funding. Some felt they could not function without grants; others felt grants were not worth the time and effort it takes to write them. That lost time detracts from primary duties of helping to provide students with special counseling, and making reasonable accommodations available.

Others complained that grants were undependable. Some of the counselors indicated that the types of grants that had once been useful were no longer available, or that some grants had changed their focus so much they were no longer useful to the students in their college's service areas. Additionally, some of the counselors complained that information pertaining to the availability of many of funding sources was not disseminated to them. They expressed the perception that relying on these funds

constituted a necessary evil. Collectively the participants indicated that they should not have to rely upon grant funds to sustain their activities. Instead, they said the state should provide sufficient funding to carry out services that are mandated by federal and state statutes.

Dr. Edwin Barnes, who was serving as the conference liaison to the Virginia Community College System, observed that funding for "Disabilities Support Services in the Virginia Community College System was horribly inadequate" (Discussion group, June 11, 1999). Dr. Barnes proposed that community colleges should be funded using a different formula from the current Full-Time Equivalency Formula (FTEF). He explained that Virginia increases the amount of funding that it provides for each student who is identified with a disability and received special services in public secondary schools. He said that this doubling formula makes sense, because providing services to students with disabilities requires so much time and expense. Therefore, his proposal was that the "Virginia Community College System increase the percentage of funding per each full-time equivalent student identified with a disability attending community colleges. Thus from the perspective of a college president, each local administration would have additional revenue to budget appropriately for the needs of those students identified as disabled" (Discussion group, June 11, 1999). Dr. Barnes then pointed out the two major obstacles with his proposal. He explained that issues of changes in appropriations must be approved by the General Assembly of Virginia. However, it must first be supported, and proposed from the Virginia Community College System. The second issue is that the Virginia Community College System does not even currently

require any of the 23 colleges to provide any accounting for the numbers of students with disabilities. While some colleges do their own individual identification and tracking methods, there is currently no system-wide requirement to provide tracking of the specific numbers of students with disabilities. Several of the participants observed that no political solutions could ever be achieved for funding disabilities support services unless the system can prove the need by providing the specific data on the population.

At the conclusion of the large group discussion, counselors from six community colleges met in small workgroup sessions to work on funding concerns. This workgroup formulated specific recommendations to address problems and concerns identified by the conference participants. Table 7 presents the observations and recommendations which were later submitted by the members of the ad hoc workgroup to address funding concerns.

Table 7

Ad-Hoc Workgroup Report: Funding

Objective I: To examine funding concerns

Workgroup Members: Elizabeth Davis, Joyce Knight, Marie Marsden, Claire Robinson, Mike Barton, Paula Dean, Jean Beach, Candice Graziano, & Marilyn Starkes

A. Observations
   1. Services funded by grant programs have changed their focus and do not serve all students with disabilities.
   2. Grant funding for College services are not dependable.
   3. Line items or resources for disability services are based on an reactionary approach rather than a proactive one.

B. Recommendations
   1. Determine the number of students served with special needs from the 23 community colleges within the last three years.
   2. Identify the typical funding for core services.
   3. Identify the budget amounts, salaries, costs per campus & funding sources.
   4. Determine the hidden costs for services to people with disabilities who are served but do not enroll and those who are enrolled with a disability but are not counted as a special needs student.
   5. Explore the possibility of forming partnerships with companies that are committed to employing people with disabilities. Link disability service and funding with the VCCS Workforce Development initiative.
   6. Transfer a percentage of the end of year surplus dollars to special service budget to supplement the upcoming year's budget.
   7. Request funding from VCCS for full time interpreters at the more needy VCCS schools.
   8. Request VCCS to obtain large federal grants for distribution to the regions and pilot schools for funding disability services.
   9. Develop a model for regular and contingency funding for colleges in the VCCS.
   10. Designate funds for a VCCS disabilities liaison to coordinate activities and provide a conduit for information.
   11. Utilize existing funding through Tech Prep to facilitate access for students who are transitioning to college.
   12. Utilize available funding through PepNet for staff development and faculty training.
   13. Based on needs assessment, it is recommended that VCCS develop a line item to provide funding for disability services.

14. Assistive technology funding to be included as a component of the overall technology budget/learning resources budget.

C. Other Comments:
   1. Assistive technology is needed on all campuses and training for personnel. People who may be served under the Workforce Development Initiative may require special needs including assistive technology.
   2. Core services should be provided on each campus with an office or designated person on each campus.
   3. Develop partnership with VCU through Liz Getzel who administers large grant funded programs/services.

Source: Williams (1999)

Analysis of Funding Concerns

A definitive theme that emerged from this issue is that the participants were adamant and unanimous in their perception that current funding levels for serving students with disabilities are inadequate. It is significant that they spent more time discussing this topic than any other, and as has been noted in the other three focus topics, some of these discussions were at least partially related to having insufficient resources to provide adequate services. Furthermore, Dr. Barnes provided tremendous validation for this perception, particularly since his viewpoint was that of President of New River Community College.

The data thus far indicates that these counselors have two strong perceptions. The first is that they are under-funded, and the second is that the Virginia Community College System should play a major role in helping alleviate this condition. Recommendation number one states "determine the number of students served with special needs from the 23 community colleges within the last three years (see Table 7)." We learned from this recommendation, and the large group discussions, that the Virginia Community College System has not tracked such numbers. Since they have not historically tracked such numbers, perhaps the Virginia Community College System has not provided extra funds thus far because they did not realize the magnitude and scope of the population. We do know that the Virginia Community College System has historically left it up to each of the 23 college presidents to utilize their existing allocations as they deem appropriate. Logically, we may also reasonably draw the assumption that disabilities support services would be improved if the Virginia Community College System would provide additional

funding. Therefore, why should the Virginia Community College System deviate from this process and provide any additional funding for disability support services if they do not have the numbers to do so?

The review of the literature provides the definitive answer. The Commonwealth of Virginia's Higher Education Workgroup made the following recommendation regarding funding available to the Virginia Community College System and the Governor (1994):

> Recommendation 1
>
> III. A uniform system of data collection should be implemented on each campus identifying such information as number of students served by disability category, services/accommodations provided by support office and adjunct services on campus, and student performance on success rates. This should be collected and compiled at the state level and utilize the support mechanisms such as the RADDS system for community colleges.
>
> IV. State funding and funding systems
>
> Though some funding exists for serving students with disabilities, it is **grossly inadequate** SCHEV, Virginia Community College System, and DRS need to examine funding for core campus services for students with disabilities and make recommendations for adequate funding of needed services.
>
> Provide additional grant opportunities to develop services.
>
> A. Provide support staff information on available grants.
>
> B. Involve support service people in the budget process (p.3).

Several important points become apparent from these recommendations. The first point is that these recommendations, cited in 1994, are almost a mirror image of the perceptions made by the counselors in this study in 1999. For this researcher, they also provide validation of the perceptions of the counselors in this study, particularly since they were presented to the Virginia Community College System by a different population. In my review of the literature, I was unable to determine why these recommendations were not acted upon following their original presentation to the Virginia Community College System in 1994.

Summary

Chapter Four has presented a qualitative analysis of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System. This chapter also cites constructive recommendations specifically aimed at enhancing and improving counseling services for students with disabilities who attend community colleges in the Twenty-First Century. Using the naturalistic inquiry methodology, this analysis focused upon four research questions that evolved from the concerns expressed by the participants in this study. The four research questions that were examined in this analysis were:

1. What documentation should Disability Support Services Counselors require of students claiming disabilities in Virginia's community colleges?
2. What types of core services should be available to students with disabilities at all Virginia's community colleges?

3. What types of systems-wide technical assistance and coordination regarding disabilities support services issues should be provided by the Virginia Community College System?
4. How can community colleges in Virginia obtain adequate resources to provide for increasing numbers of students with disabilities?

Table 8 provides a summary of the recommendations of the ad-hoc workgroup as each relate to the focus concerns. These recommendations were provided as constructive alternatives to enhance and improve counseling services to students with disabilities in the Virginia Community College System.

Table 8

Ad-Hoc Workgroup Recommendations and Analysis

A. Documentation
   1. Establish uniformity in guidelines for documenting a disability;
   2. Documentation should reflect AHEAD Standards;
   3. Directory of diagnosticians;
   4. Continuous training in documentation interpretation;
   5. Guidelines for intra-system transfer of documentation.

B. Core Services
   1. Guidelines for providing full-time status to part-time students with disabilities;
   2. Collaboration with East/West VCCS interpreter coordinators;
   3. Assistive technology on each campus to include adaptive workstations, large screen monitors, text scanning software, voice control software, text enlarging software, CCTV, assistive listening devices, TDD, 2trach/4track recorders;
   4. Technical support to improve utilization of federal recruitment programs;
   5. Disability information through career services on technical standards in the workplace;
   6. VCCS tracking process.

C. State-wide Coordination
   1. System-wide guidelines for interpreting services;
   2. Distance learning & interpreting alternatives;
   3. Implementation of a standard tracking procedure;
   4. Facilitate professional development utilizing VCCS peer groups, AHEAD, VCCA, New Horizons, Transition Forum, VCA & VAEO;
   5. Establish consistency in services from state agencies;
   6. VCCS College clusters based on regions to share resources & for collaboration.

D. Funding
   1. Establish uniformity in guidelines for documenting a disability;
   2. Documentation should reflect AHEAD Standards;
   3. Directory of diagnosticians;
   4. Continuous training in documentation interpretation;
   5. Guidelines for intra-system transfer of documentation.

Source: Williams (1999).

With regard to the data, one of the central themes that emerged was that the participants in this study have strong concerns regarding the wide variances that exist in which students with disabilities are provided services in each of the 23 individual community colleges. As the subjects discussed each of the four focus concerns, it became apparent to the participants that each community college in the VCCS has developed its own unique standards of providing counseling services to students who request support services under the ADA.

The results of a survey conducted by the Virginia Board for Persons with Disabilities (2000), may provide some indication of the degree in which this individualized approach on the part of the Virginia Community College System might impact upon variations in services to students with disabilities. This survey (2000) provides comparisons of all segments of postsecondary education regarding services provided for students with disabilities. The data cited in Section VII, Policies/Procedures for Disabled Students, is perhaps the most relevant with respect to the issue of variations in services. Section VII states:

> While nearly all (92%) postsecondary institutions surveyed in Virginia have written policies of equal access to all courses, programs, services, and jobs, the lowest number contained in this written policy section is the one for community colleges (59%) concerning academic adjustments and auxillary aids determined on case by case basis (p. 7).

The finding that only 59 percent of the institutions in the Virginia Community College System responding (18 percent) had written policies (2000) regarding disability

support services, in contrast to 92 percent of four-year colleges and universities, represents a significant difference. This difference of 33 percent also appears to directly support the concerns and recommendations of Disability Support Services Counselors, discussed in this section, for system wide relief to redress this apparent disparity.

In a sense, this conference was a cry for help on the part of the participants to achieve assistance in improving the standards of practice for disability support services in community colleges across the Commonwealth. Therefore, to improve and enhance counseling services and ensure consistency throughout the Virginia Community College System, the overwhelming perception of these participants was a systems-wide approach needs to be undertaken with respect to the standards of practice and funding of all disabilities support services programs in the Virginia Community College System.

Chapter Five summarizes the first four chapters of the study. It provides the major findings of the study, and also presents some of the constructive actions already achieved by the release of the preliminary data in this project. The final chapter also provides the limitations of the study, recommendations about the project, and the implications for future practice of Disability Support Services Counselors in the Virginia Community College System.

CHAPTER V

Findings, Recommendations, and Implications

This chapter includes five sections. The first section identifies the statement of the problem and purpose of the project. The second section summarizes the research methods that were used. The third section presents the major findings and some of the actions taken as a result of the project, based upon a release of preliminary data to the Virginia Community College System. The fourth section presents the limitations of the study with recommendations for further research directions. The final section provides the implications of this project and concluding remarks.

Purpose

The purposes of this research project were to promote a greater understanding of the structure of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System and to provide the key stakeholders with recommendations to improve counseling services for this population. Disability support services was chosen because the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act has resulted in creating a unique challenge to counselors serving this population. A significant amount of literature currently exists regarding students with disabilities in postsecondary education, but the majority of this data is in the form of surveys and quantitative studies. There is a paucity of qualitative data concerning the provision of support services to students with disabilities. To date there has not been a

qualitative study done on the structure of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System. Few studies exist regarding the quality and scope of counseling services for students with disabilities attending community colleges in spite of the increasing numbers of students with disabilities enrolling in two-year colleges and the demands on the system to respond to the counseling needs of this population, a qualitative analysis of the impact of support services is lacking. According to HEATH (Henderson, 1999) 9.4 percent of all college freshmen, now report having a disability, and the majority of these students are enrolling in two- year colleges. Furthermore, students with learning disabilities constitute the largest category of college students requesting accommodations, and the majority of these individuals are enrolling in community colleges (Henderson, 1999). Yet in the decade since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, several significant national trends have occurred that have challenged the ability of community college counselors to provide support services to students with disabilities. Given the challenges to the counseling profession since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, what is the current structure and status of disabilities support services in community colleges in the Commonwealth of Virginia? How well are counselors serving students with disabilities in Virginia's community colleges in response to the unique challenges presented by this population? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, what are some of the ways in which counseling services to students with disabilities can be enhanced in the future?

Research Methods

To gain a better understanding of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System, this study first conducted a review of the literature. The review of the literature began by examining the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) upon higher education and community colleges at the national level. The review of the literature then examined the legal requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and how legal mandates have specifically impacted upon counselors serving as Disability Support Services Specialists in community colleges across the nation. Through a review of the literature on the provision of counseling and support services to students with disabilities in postsecondary education in general, and Virginia Community Colleges in particular, I was able to generate the following four research questions. What documentation standards and procedures should counselors be using to verify eligibility for students requesting disability support services? What types of core services should counselors be providing for students with disabilities? What types of systems-wide assistance and support should be available to Disability Support Specialist providers? Are adequate funds and resources available for counselors to meet the needs of students with disabilities?

Because quantitative research cannot be used to accurately describe professional experiences, naturalistic inquiry, a qualitative methodology rooted in ethnography and phenomenology, was the method of choice. Researchers using this qualitative method believe that there are multiple realities that are socially constructed and these realities cannot be studied in pieces, but rather must be studied holistically and in context (Miller,

1996). A naturalistic study therefore provided the tools for this researcher to accomplish a better understanding of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System.

Data collection for this study was accomplished through an analysis of the feedback obtained from 36 counselors from 16 of Virginia's community colleges. These 36 counselors participated in the Virginia Community College System Conference on Disabilities Support Services in June of 1999 to address professional concerns regarding special services. Analysis of both the large group discussions, and the recommendations of the workgroups responses to the four areas of concern were cited in detail. The study also included citations of other findings or authoritative sources from the literature that provided information relevant to the four areas of concern under analysis.

Findings and Results

A number of significant findings and results have emerged from this project. The findings and results are presented in this section in relation to the four research concerns that were examined in this study.

Documentation

To gain a better understanding of disability support services in the Virginia Community College System, this study first examined the documentation standards that counselors were using to provide appropriate services to students with disabilities.

1. Based upon a review of the literature and the feedback of the participants, this study found that wide variances exist between community colleges in Virginia, with respect to documentation

requirements and practices used by counselors.

2. Furthermore, the variances that were identified in documentation standards and practices have, according to the disability support services counselors in this study, created problems and barriers for students enrolling in, or transferring between colleges in the Virginia Community College System, particularly for students with psychological diagnoses.
3. The perception exists among the participants of this study that the skills and training in the interpretation and use of documentation is lacking in many colleges in the Virginia Community College System.
4. As a result of the concerns cited by participants of this study, the Higher Education Workgroup in Virginia (2000) has formally recommended that the Virginia Community College System, and all other state-supported colleges in Virginia, adopt the documentation standards set forth by AHEAD (see Table 3).

Core Services

The second area of concern that the study focused upon was the provision of core services practiced by counselors serving students with disabilities.

1. Based upon the review of the literature and the feedback of the participants, the study found that counselors provide divergent standards of support services to students with disabilities in Virginia community colleges.
2. While some community colleges in Virginia are reported in the literature to be providing exemplary services, other institutions are

reportedly not providing many of those basic services that are required as appropriate accommodations, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

3. The Association of Higher Education and Disabilities of Virginia (AHEAD-VA, 1999), and many of the counselors in the Virginia Community College System, have recommended the adoption of certain systems-wide "standards of practice" and services for students with disabilities (see Program Standards in Appendix B).

Systems-Wide Coordination and Support

The third area of concern studied was the level of systems wide support and coordination available to disability support providers.

1. Most of the participants in this study expressed concerns over the lack of legal and technical support available from the Systems Office regarding the provision of appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities.
2. In response to the concerns cited in the previous finding, the Virginia Community College System (2000) has just announced the direct availability of the Office of the Deputy Attorney General to provide consultation on legal issues for counselors providing disability support services (Ms. Rita Woltz, VCCS, contact 786-2428).
3. According to the participants in this study, there exists a critical lack of qualified interpreters and requisite funds to support interpreter services for hearing impaired students in Virginia Community Colleges.

4. In response to the concerns cited by the participants regarding interpreter services, the Virginia Community College System has brokered a cooperative agreement with the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) and Department for the Visually Handicapped (DVH). This historic interagency agreement will provide increased interagency resources and funding support for interpreter services for hearing impaired students attending Virginia's community colleges for a period of three years (2000-2003). According to this agreement, "community colleges may submit bills for reimbursement up to 40% of the cost for qualified interpreters and Captioning Real Time Services to DRS, and DVH will provide eligible individuals adaptive equipment necessary for academic study and participation in the classroom (p. 4-5).
5. As a direct result of the recommendations of the participants of this study, the Virginia Community College System has established an electronic distribution list service for Disability Support Services Counselors regarding the coordination of issues regarding disability support services in the future. According to Mr. Joseph Barden of the Virginia Community College System (2000), this distribution service will now provide counselors with immediate access to information pertaining to disability support services through an electronic mail distribution list to all 23 community colleges in Virginia.

Funding and Resources

The final area of concern that the study focused upon was the level of funding and resources available to counselors providing services to students with disabilities in

Virginia's community colleges.

1. Based upon the review of the literature and the feedback provided by the participants, this study found that funding levels available for disability support services programs in the Virginia Community College System are currently inadequate.
2. According to the participants of this study, many of the community colleges in Virginia rely heavily upon securing grant funding in order to provide compliance and accommodations for students with disabilities. Many of the participants felt the Virginia Community College System should provide state-wide announcements of the availability of federal and state funding proposals for students with disabilities in order to ensure that all 23 community colleges have equitable access to these grant funds in the future.
3. Some of Virginia's community colleges reports that they track the numbers of students with disabilities served and the amount of funds expended on this population. As of the date of the publication of this study, however, the Virginia Community College System has neither required Virginia's community colleges to track the numbers of students of students with disabilities served throughout the system nor the amount of funds expended in serving these students.
4. House Bill 1672, Data Collection on Students with Disabilities, (2000) requires that the Virginia Community College System to develop a tracking system on services to students with disabilities to be implemented on each campus, and

that this data should be compiled and submitted in a report to the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia annually. The Higher Education Workgroup in Virginia (2000) is currently developing specific recommendations to assist the Virginia Community College System in the implementation of this reporting requirement to SCHEV.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Care should be taken not to over-generalize the findings of this study to other populations. The populations of both the respondents, and the clients referenced in this study were specifically targeted to disabilities support services in the Virginia Community College System. For example, to assume that the findings of this study would have applicability to community colleges in another state, or even in other segments of the higher education community could prove to be questionable at best, and possibly erroneous. Additionally, by analyzing the responses of the most experienced counselors who volunteered to participate in the Disability Support Services Workgroups, one could readily argue that the study was conducted on a biased sample of the population. It should also be noted, however, that the purpose of this study was to conduct a critical analysis of the current structure of disabilities support services in community colleges. Therefore, the use of responses obtained from some of the most experienced and committed Disability Support Services counselors in the Virginia Community College System, provided much richer results than randomization procedures of the subjects would have yielded.

The results of this type of qualitative study are also limited by the lack of controls and descriptive statistical comparisons available through quantitative techniques. However, since the purpose of this study was to report expert analysis and provide professional

recommendations to improve disability support services, the use of quantitative techniques could also limit the richness (quality) of the responses on the four focus concerns. One possibility for such improvement would be to administer surveys to counselors regarding some of the disability support services issues addressed in these findings in the future. This study also cited examples of the results of such quantitative data obtained from authoritative sources as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the Association on Higher Education and Disabilities (AHEAD), relevant to the issues under analysis in the four focus questions. The findings of this study could still be greatly enhanced in the future, however, if follow-up studies would incorporate the use of a quantitative instrument(s) in the design.

Implications

This project on disability support services in the Virginia Community College System adds to the growing scholarship regarding the provision of counseling services to students with special needs in postsecondary education. The findings in the study phase of this project provides a better understanding of some of the specific problems and challenges that counselors are facing as they strive to provide appropriate services to students with disabilities in community colleges in Virginia.

Achieving a greater understanding of these problems and articulating them to the key stakeholders is, however, merely the essential first step in helping counselors obtain the resources and solutions needed to improve services to students with disabilities. The counselors who participated in the Disabilities Support Services Conference on June 11, 1999, met because they wanted to seek assistance to improve services to the students with disabilities in the Virginia Community College System. When these professionals sought

help from the Virginia Community College System in funding and sponsoring this conference, they knew they would need to not only articulate their problems, but to also provide viable recommendations that could provide redress for their most compelling professional challenges. This dissertation is, therefore, dedicated to the efforts of these counselors who laboriously worked at formulating the recommendations cited in this project. As a participant observer, I merely served as an instrument to use their feedback and efforts as a significant basis for the data portion of this study. I can, therefore, take little credit for the hard work they extended in the formulation of the recommendations cited in Chapter Four.

My original intent for this project had been to use both the findings of the study and the recommendations of the counselors in a formal report to the Virginia Community College System as a vehicle to attain improvements in disability support services at some point in the future. Some of the problems cited as concerns in this report were so compelling, however, that opportunities for redressing some of them ocurred before this project could be published. First, Mr. Joseph Barden, of the Student Services Division of the Virginia Community College System, expressed an active interest in providing system wide support for many of the concerns cited at the conference. Mr. Barden visited with me in October of 1999, at which time I shared with him the preliminary findings and recommendations of the counselors (see Appendix C). Mr. Barden and I discussed both the problems and recommendations in terms of implementing solutions in the future. In January of 2000, Elizabeth Getzell, the Chairperson of the Higher Education Workgroup of Virginia, learned of my work on this project and requested that I become a member of

in my review of the literature for this project, I discovered that the American Association of Community Colleges (Barnett, 1996) had already named this new entity a Disability Support Specialist (DSS). The DSS title seemed to be so appropriate for the challenges faced by me, as well as my colleagues, that I have referenced it frequently throughout this paper. On a professional note, I also adopted it for use recently when I assigned it as the job classification title at John Tyler Community College. Regardless of what my colleagues and I are labeled, however, many of us are now aware of how we have had to struggle to reinvent ourselves professionally, particularly since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Until fairly recently, many efforts have been focused at each individual community college, just as mine were for over twenty years.

I learned from my colleagues during this study that we could be much more effective in our efforts to improve services for students with disabilities on our individual campuses if we work together collectively with professional organizations and the Virginia Community College System to improve disability support services on a system-wide basis. It seems only fitting to offer this project to the Virginia Community College System as a part of my contribution to those efforts to improve the quality of support services for counselors serving as Disability Support Services Specialists in all 23 of Virginia's Community Colleges. It is my hope that the increased knowledge and collaborative efforts already gained from this project will result in even more improvements for the future.

that body. The Higher Education Workgroup had recently become active again, and was also seeking to improve services to students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary institutions in Virginia.

Through these two opportunities, the study evolved into a project that has already resulted in improvements in disability support services in the Virginia Community College System. The six positive actions that are cited in the Findings and Results section of this chapter are attributed to the actions taken by the Virginia Community College System and the Higher Education Workgroups based upon the concerns and feedback provided to me by the counselors at the Disabilities Support Services Conference. The joint effort of these two organizations and this study, provided the impetus for the system wide changes that have already taken place, and hopefully will continue in the future.

Conclusion

I originally selected the direction of this project because I wanted to contribute to my own professional development as I worked toward improving support services for students with disabilities attending John Tyler Community College. This microcosmic focus was for me a natural one, because a major portion of my professional career and identity has been as a counselor with the responsibility for serving students with disabilities in that specific location. As I pondered the concluding remarks to this final chapter, I became aware of how much the project has changed my perspective from my original focus on my institution. I learned that as a community college counselor that has been serving students with disabilities for over twenty years, I have had the opportunity to participate in what may arguably be referred to as the emergence of a new professional entity. For example,

CURRICULUM VITAE

Robert J. Tutton was born on April 9, 1944, in San Diego, California, and is an American citizen. He graduated from Stafford high School, Stafford, Virginia, in 1963. He served in the United States Air Force from 1965 through 1969. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from Christopher Newport College in 1972. He completed a Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling in 1974, and was hired as a counselor for the Department of Rehabilitative Services in Chesterfield County, Virginia. In 1975, he accepted a position as the Coordinator of Veterans Affairs at John Tyler Community College, in Chester, Virginia. With the exception of a period of active duty as the Education Officer in the Virginia Army National Guard from 1985 to 1990, Mr. Tutton has served as a counselor and adjunct Psychology Professor with the Virginia Community College System for 20 years. While employed at John Tyler Community College, he completed 30 credits towards a Master of Arts in Psychology at Chapman College during 1979. He then completed his Educational Specialist Degree in Counseling from the College of William and Mary, in 1995.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX B

AHEAD Program Standards

Based upon empirical data (Dukes & Shaw, 1998) involving more than 1,000 postsecondary disability professionals, the Association on Higher Education And Disability (*AHEAD*) is pleased to present Program Standards for Offices for Students with Disabilities. The Program Standards represent those service components that are fundamental for assuring equal educational access for postsecondary students with disabilities. They set parameters for essential postsecondary disability services and assert the credibility and unique responsibilities of offices that serve students with disabilities. Program Standards should serve as a tool for professionals to proactively develop appropriate services that meet both the letter and the spirit of the law.

The 27 Program Standards across nine categories have been identified as essential regardless of type of school (two- or four-year), funding source (public or private), location (U.S. or Canada), or competitiveness (open enrollment vs. competitive). Their implementation should provide more consistency across institutions and help students with disabilities by simplifying the selecion of postsecondary services.

AHEAD Program Standards

To facilitate equal access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, an office that provides services to students with disabilities should:

1. Consultation / Collaboration / Awareness

1.1 Serve as an advocate for students with disabilities to ensure equal access.

1.2 Provide disability representation on relevant campus committees (e.g., academic standards, policy development).

2. Information Dissemination

2.1 Disseminate information through institutional publications regarding disability services and how to access them.

2.2 Provide services that promote access to the campus community (e.g., TDD's, alternative materials formatting, interpreter services, adaptive technology).

2.3 Provide referral information to students with disabilities regarding available campus and community resources (e.g., assessment, counseling).

3. Faculty / Staff Awareness

3.1 Provide consultation with faculty regarding academic accommodations, compliance with legal responsibilities, as well as instructional, programmatic, physical, and curriculum modifications.

3.2 Provide consultation with administrators regarding academic accommodations, compliance with legal responsibilities, as well as instructional, programmatic, physical, and curriculum modifications.

3.3 Provide individualized disability awareness training for campus constituencies (e.g., faculty, staff, administrators).

3.4 Provide feedback to faculty regarding general assistance available through the office that provides services to students with disabilities.

4. Academic Adjustments

4.1 Maintain records that document the plan for the provision of selected accommodations.

4.2 Determine with the students, appropriate academic adjustments consistent with the student's documentation.

4.3 Have final responsibility for determining effective academic accommodations which do not fundamentally alter the program of study.

5. Instructional Interventions

5.1 Advocate for instruction in learning strategies (e.g., attention and memory strategies, planning, self-monitoring, time management, organization, problem-solving).

6. Counseling and Advocacy

6.1 Assist students with disabilities to assume the role of self-advocate.

7. Policies and Procedures

7.1 Develop written policies and guidelines regarding procedures for determining and accessing "reasonable accommodations."

7.2 Establish guidelines for institutional rights and responsibilities with respect to service provision (e.g., documentation of a disability, course substitution/waiver).

7.3 Establish guidelines for student rights and responsibilities with respect to service provision (e.g., documentation of a disability, course substitution/waiver).

7.4 Develop written policies and guidelines regarding confidentiality of disability information.

7.5 Encourage the development of policies and guidelines for settling a formal complaint regarding the determination of a "reasonable accommodation."

8. Program Development and Evaluation

8.1 Provide services that are based on the institution's mission or service philosophy.

8.2 Coordinate services for students with disabilities through a full-time professional.

8.3 Collect student feedback to measure satisfaction with disability services.

8.4 Collect data to monitor use of disability services.

8.5 Report program evaluation data to administrators.

9. Training and Professional Development

9.1 Provide disability services staff with on-going opportunities for professional development (e.g., conferences, credit courses, membership in professional organizations).

9.2 Provide services by professional(s) with training and experience working with college students/adults with disabilities.

9.3 Adhere to the Association of Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) Code of Ethics.

- - - -

APPENDIX C

The Virginia Community College
Disability Services Conference

co-sponsored by
The Postsecondary Education Consortium

FRIDAY JUNE 11, 1999
WYNDHAM GARDEN HOTEL
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

***Schedule is tentative and subject to change without prior notice.**

Friday June 11, 1999

8:30 AM - 9:15 AM	Registration and Continental Breakfast
	Salon C
9:15 AM - 9:30 AM	Opening Remarks Ms. Joyce Knight, Conference Coordinator
	Welcome Ms. Julia Walker: EEOC and Special Programs Coordinator for the VCCS
9:30 AM - 10:30 AM	Students with Disabilities-Legal Considerations Ms. Rita Woltz: Attorney, Virginia Attorney General's Office
10:30 AM -10:40 AM	Break
10:40 AM - 12:00 PM	Working Collaboratively- Panel Presentation
	Moderator: Ms. Jeananne Dixon: Director of Leap Program, New River Community College & Conference Coordinator

	Panelists: Dr. Edwin Barnes: President, New River Community College Ms. Margaret Walsh: Manager of Education Services, Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services Ms. Patricia Johnson: Chairperson, Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College Mr. Donnell Ashmore: Director of Postsecondary Education Consortium Mr. Ramon Rodriguez: Project Officer for the United States Department of Education Office Of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
	Lunch Atrium
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM	Work Group Meetings **Facilitator:** Ms. Philicia Wilson, Conference Coordinator & Counselor Germanna Community College
2:30 PM - 3:00 PM	Work Group Reports
3:00 PM - 3:10 PM	Break
3:10 PM - 3:20 PM	Closing Remarks by Mr. Joseph Barden, VCCS
3:20 PM - 3:30 PM	Ad Hoc Committee Charge by Dr. Barnes
3:30 PM	Brief Ad Hoc Committee Meeting

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Workgroup Instructions

Thank you for participating in the VCCS Disability Services Workgroup. Your responsibility will be to identify and recommend standards, procedures, programs, strategies and/or resources to improve the delivery of services to students with disabilities who attend Virginia's community colleges. Please review the report included in your folder. The areas of focus for this meeting are the following:

I. Funding Resources

II. Core Services

III. Statewide Coordination

IV. Documentation *(Public school systems are no longer required to complete full psychological or psychoeducational batteries for graduating seniors regardless of the recency of the documentation. How can we best respond to this new development and ensure services for students with learning disabilities?)*

Each group has been assigned an area of focus for their discussion. The four areas were taken primarily from the recommendations of a report from a Virginia Higher Education Workgroup submitted in 1994 through Project Unite. They are also recurring themes that have surfaced during interagency discussions and conferences.

Each group should complete the following:

1. Elect a recorder who would also agree to serve on the task force that will synthesize group recommendations and compile a report to be presented at the Fall meeting for Deans and Provosts.

2. Members of your group are asked to share best practices and innovative ways that your campuses have met the topic related demands.

3. Identify areas of continuing concern that should be addressed at the System level.

4. Compile a short report to be presented during the report session.

Background

In 1992 the General Assembly directed the Virginia Board of Education to conduct a study of the demographics of special education students exiting education. The Board of Education recommended that a study group identify and recommend programs and strategies to increase the success of young adults with disabilities in postsecondary education programs. Dr. Ed Barnes, President of New River Community College, Philicia Wilson, Counselor Germanna Community College and Jeananne Dixon, Counselor New River Community College participated in the workgroup. Other members represented four-year institutions and agencies. The Workgroup submitted its recommendations to the Board of Education December 1994.

In November 1998, Mr. Joe Barden, Director of Student Support Service - Systems Office was contacted and support was requested in facilitating a conference for special needs counselors to revisit the 1994 Workgroup recommendations. Mr. Barden facilitated funding for a system-wide conference for the VCCS special needs counselors and providers to examine the recommendations of the workgroup and to develop recommendations to improve services to students with disabilities attending Virginia Community Colleges.

The conference was held in Richmond, June 11, 1999 and 16 Virginia Community Colleges were represented. A total of 44 individuals participated. Presenters included representatives from the Attorney General's Office, the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services, and the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

During the conference participants formed four workgroups to address critical issues related to funding of services, statewide coordination, core services and documentation. An ad hoc group was formed to consolidate workgroup recommendations and to develop a report summary addressing the need for a Systems-wide Approach for Providing Services to Students with Disabilities. The report summary is attached.

The Virginia Community College System Workgroup Report Summary from the June 11, 1999 Conference

Ad hoe Committee Members: **Gary Medlin, Jeananne Dixon, Maria Marsden, Marilyn Starkes**, Scott Guebert, Lucy Howlett, Kerven McDougal, **Sue Rice**, Joanne Credle & **Philicia Wilson**

Goal: To Explore a Systems-wide Approach to Improve the Accessibility of Virginia Community Colleges for Students with Disabilities.

Objectives:

I. To examine funding concerns

II. To identify core services

III. To articulate critical components for statewide coordination

IV. To facilitate consistency of documentation requirements

Observations and Recommendations

Objective I To examine funding concerns

A. Observations

1. Services funded by grant programs have changed their focus and do not serve all students with disabilities.

2. Grant funding for college services is not dependable

3. Line items or resources for disability services are based on a reactionary rather than a proactive approach

B. Recommendations

1. Determine the number of students served with special needs from the 23 community colleges within the last three years

2. Identify the typical funding for core services

3. Identify the budget amounts, salaries, costs per campus & funding sources

4. Determine the hidden costs for services to people with disabilities who are served but do not enroll and those who are enrolled with a disability but are not counted as a special needs student

5. Explore the possibility of forming partnerships with companies that are committed to employing people with disabilities. Link disability services and funding with the VCCS Workforce Development initiative.

6. Transfer a percentage of the end of year surplus dollars to special service budget to supplement the upcoming year's budget.

7. Request funding from VCCS for full time interpreters at the more needy VCCS schools

8. Request VCCS to obtain large federal grants for distribution to the regions and pilot schools for funding disability services

9. Develop a model for regular and contingency funding for colleges in the VCCS

10. Designate funds for a VCCS disabilities liaison to coordinate activities and provide a conduit for information

11. Utilize existing funding through Tech Prep to facilitate access for students who are transitioning to college

12. Utilize available funding through PepNet for staff development and faculty training

13. Based on needs assessment, it is recommended that VCCS develop a line item to provide funding for disability services

14. Assistive technology funding to be included as a component of the overall technology budget/learning resources budget

C. 0ther Comments:

1. Assistive technology is needed on all campuses and training for personnel. Individuals served under Workforce Developemnt Initiatives may require assistive technology.

2. Core services should be provided on each campus with an office or designated person on each campus.

3. Develop partnership with VCU through Liz Getzel who administers large grant funded programs/services

Objective II To identify core services

A. Observations

1. There is a need for a designated VCCS unit that will provide guidelines and statewide leadership with the collaboration of disability service providers at each campus.

2. There is a need for counselors who work with students with disabilities to have prior experience and training relative to disability services

3. There is a need for assistive technology that allows students to perform routine tasks independently

B. Recommendations

1. Designate a VCCS unit that will provide guidelines and statewide leadership with the collaboration of disability service providers at each campus.

2. Identify an office or department with full-time employees to coordinate disability services/activities

3. Identify an overall coordinator for multi-campus to manage site coordinators/providers and to maintain consistency and quality of services

4. Provide assistive technology to minimally include the following:

Adaptive computer workstations with adjustable tables, large screen monitors
Adaptive keyboards and mice
Text-scanning software with voice output
Voice control software for hands free operation
Text-enlarging software with voice output
Software with assistance with writing
Two and four track cassette tape recorders
Speaking electronic dictionary/thesaurus
Assistive listening device

CCTV
TTY
Captioning services

Provide other services to include:
Alternative testing/adaptive testing (alternate forms of placement tests)
Interpreters
Notetakers
Scribes
Adapted materials
Physical accessibility to buildings and rooms
Access to tutorial programs as offered for general population
Priority registration

5. Encourage East West VCCS interpreter regional coordinators to seek feedback from campus disability service providers to identify interpreting needs

6. Develop guidelines for handling full time requirement status for students with disability for medical insurance purposes

7. Provide information and technical support to enhance utilization of the federal recruitment program for students with disabilities

8. Provide information on disabilities in the workplace and technical standards for students as part of the campus career services component

9. Implement recommendations from the VCCS on tracking procedures

Objective III To articulate critical components for statewide coordination

A. Observations

1. Need a pool of money to fund services and a method for determining allocations

2. Lack of availability of qualified interpreters

3. Local colleges, universities, local schools and agencies need to work collaboratively on common goals for their region

B. Recommendations

1. Develop state-wide guidelines for interpreting services

2. Explore distance learning and interpreting alternatives

3. Facilitate transition conferences to include secondary schools

4. Establish a system for tracking and reporting student data to include student inquiries, students pending documentation and those with documented disabilities (An example of a tracking model can be obtained from Tidewater Community College)

5. Utilize the following vehicles for professional development & coordinating statewide services:

   VCCS - peer groups
   AHEAD - Association on Higher Education and Disability
   VCCA - Virginia Community Colleges Association
   Expand Local consortia - i.e. Tidewater Regional, ADA Consortium
   New Horizons - assistive technology training
   Transition Forum
   Virginia Association of Educational Opportunity
   Virginia Counselor Association

6. Establish rapport with state agencies toward the development of consistency in services statewide – Current agencies include:

   VDRS
   VDVH

VDDHH
Virginia Disability Services Board

7. Develop VCCS college clusters for collaboration and sharing resources within a district

Objective IV To facilitate consistency of documentation requirements

A. Observations

1. Schools, agencies and colleges are using different definitions for learning disability

2. Requirements under IDEA are causing problems for students transitioning

B. Recommendations

1. Support collaboration among VCCS colleges and with Virginia AHEAD to establish uniformity in guidelines for documenting a disability.

2. Encourage documentation to reflect AHEAD standards

3. Develop and maintain referral list of diagnosticians

4. Train counselors and providers to interpret documentation to identify appropriate accommodations

7. Establish guidelines for intra-system transfer of documentation

C. Other Comments

VCCS needs to define who is a qualified student and who would be an "otherwise qualified" community college student. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 States "No otherwise qualified handicapped individual in the United States ... shall

be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. To be in compliance with Section 504, colleges must determine who is an otherwise qualified student with a disability. This will enable counselors to utilize limited resources more effectively

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